Promoting Acceptance:

Positivity Towards Otherness in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Becky Chambers's *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet*

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielmani käsittelee erilaisuuden hyväksymisen teemaa kahdessa tieteisromaanissa, Ursula K. Le Guinin *Pimeyden vasemmassa kädessä* ja Becky Chambersin *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planetissä*. Molemmat romaanit käsittelevät ihmisten ja avaruusolioiden välisiä suhteita, ja keskityn tarkastelemaan miten romaanien eri hahmot kokevat toisensa hyvin erilaisiksi, mutta siitä huolimatta pystyvät hyväksymään toisensa. Keskityn erityisesti sukupuolen muodostamaan erilaisuuteen. Pohdin myös tämänlaisen kerronnan vaikutusta lukijoihin ja heidän suhtautumiseensa erilaisuuteen. Käytän analyysissäni narratologista sekä feminististä kirjallisuudentutkimuksen teoriaa.

Analyysissäni osoitan ensin, että tieteiskirjallisuus on erityisen tehokas kirjallisuuden tyylilaji saamaan lukijat näkemään tuttuja ideoita uusilla tavoilla. Seuraavaksi osoitan, että romaanien hahmot kokevat toisensa erilaisiksi ja etenkin ihmishahmot ilmaisevat, että avaruusoliohahmot ovat heille toisenlaisia ja kummallisia. Romaanien avaruusolioilla ei ole sukupuolta ollenkaan; he vaihtavat sukupuoltaan elämänsä aikana ja käyttävät pronomineja binääristen englanninkielisten *he* ja *she* ulkopuolelta. Tutkielmani kuitenkin osoittaa, että romaanien hahmot pystyvät siitä huolimatta hyväksymään toisensa. Osoitan narratologisen teorian avulla, että lukijat saavat tämän kuvan hahmoista heidän ajatustensa, puheensa ja käytöksensä perusteella. Tämänlainen hyväksyminen johtaa hahmojen mahdollisuuteen muodostaa suhteita toistensa kanssa sekä romaanien yleiseen positiivisuuteen.

Analyysissäni myös tarkastelen, miten nämä romaanit ja kirjallisuus yleisesti pystyvät mahdollisesti muuttamaan lukijoiden mielipiteitä, asenteita ja jopa käytöstä. Osoitan, että kirjallisuus pystyy luultavasti muuttamaan lukijoita tällä tavalla, koska romaanit aktivoivat ja päivittävät skeemoja eli mielen malleja maailmasta. Kirjallisuus, jossa on hahmoja, pystyy myös käsittelemään asioita monitahoisemmin kuin muut tekstit sekä mahdollistamaan lukijan kuvittelemaan itsensä hahmon tilalle, mikä voi avata lukijan silmät uusille tavoille katsoa maailmaa ja ihmisiä ympärillään. Nämä romaanit myös esittävät sukupuolen käsitteen tavalla, joka haastaa yhteiskunnassamme tavallisen käsityksen binäärisestä sukupuoli-identiteetistä, ja näin kutsuvat lukijoita asennoitumaan sukupuoleen eri tavalla kuin mihin he ovat todennäköisesti tottuneet.

Tutkielmastani käy ilmi, että romaaneissa esiintyvä positiivinen kuvaus asenteista toisenlaisuuteen osoittaa lukijoille, että erilaisuuden hyväksyminen johtaa positiivisiin seuraamuksiin. Täten romaanit mahdollisesti kannustavat lukijoita hyväksymään erilaisuuden, jonka he kohtaavat omassa elämässään.

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1. Introduction

Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words (Le Guin 2014).

In this thesis I will analyze two science fiction novels, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Becky Chambers's *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet* (2014), and consider how the positive portrayal of otherness is constructed in the novels as well as how it is portrayed to readers. I will also consider how the novels, due to this portrayal, can potentially lead to readers changing their attitudes and even behavior towards people who are different from them. Additionally, I will explore the ideas of how literature can influence readers as well as what happens in readers' cognition that can cause this effect. I chose to analyze science fiction (SF) works specifically in this thesis, because although SF is often viewed as a genre that does not have as much merit as other, more serious genres do, I believe it to be exceptionally efficient in influencing readers due to the freedom that the genre allows. As Janelle Evans states in her essay about the qualities of SF: "science fiction is uniquely suited to the herculean task of allowing our species to experience, understand, and accept the varied ways in which people express what it means to be human" (2018, 145). The key word here for my thesis, then, is "to accept", as I am specifically looking at acceptance of otherness in this thesis.

Furthermore, I chose to analyze novels that portray positivity and hope in this thesis. Often SF novels present us with grim looks into the future, depicting what can go wrong as a consequence of our actions, or negative portrayals of interactions between humans and forms of extraterrestrial life. *The Left Hand of Darkness* (hereafter, *Left Hand*) and *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet* (hereafter, *Long Way*) deviate from that norm and present aliens as "other", but the characters' attitudes towards those others as positive. In her article about *Long Way*, Beatriz Hermida Ramos argues that the novel can be categorized as belonging to a genre called hopepunk (2020, 29). Although it is not a common term within academia yet (2020, 28-29), hopepunk has been defined in social media as a genre that weaponizes hope and "combines the aesthetics of choosing gentleness with the messy politics of revolution" (Romano 2018). Hermida Ramos asserts that *Long Way* belongs in this genre as in it "emotions and affective care and support become forms of concrete action to directly challenge capitalist, racist and cisheteronormative systems that create the material conditions

of marginalization" (2020, 39). In other words, the positive emotions and acceptance in the novel challenge the systems we have in place when it comes to marginalized communities. I argue that *Left Hand* can be considered hopepunk as well. As I will illustrate in this thesis, the novel contains, at its core, a message of accepting and understanding the other, and that implementing those values in our societies would bring about positive consequences. I think it is interesting to consider what kinds of effects this kind of positivity can cause in readers, in opposition to the common bleakness of SF novels that affect readers by illustrating the state of our world through negativity and pessimism.

In this thesis I will also illustrate that literature can influence how readers think and behave and therefore can be a tool to challenge injustices in the real world. Although there has been considerable progress towards equality, the Western world arguably continues to be a harder place to live for people who are different from the "default" of our society – straight, white and able-bodied men – and the positive message found in these novels can be applied to any groups of people who have been othered. However, as I take gender as my focus of otherness in this thesis, I will demonstrate the way that othering people due to their gender causes them harm. As Jémeljan Hakemulder points out, psychologists have discovered that humans treat their ingroup members differently than outgroup members: they show favoritism towards the ingroup members and tend to see outgroup members generally more negatively than ingroup members (2001, 231). One of the aspects that divide people in this way is gender. Women continue to face challenges due to their gender, especially when, in addition to being a woman, they have another marginalized identity, such as being non-white, queer or disabled. Yet, it is people who do not fit the gender binary, such as non-binary, genderqueer or transgender people, who are viewed as *more* other, and therefore face worse consequences because of it. Thus, having a gender outside of the binary marks a person as an outgroup member, which often causes others to have negative attitudes towards them.

Being a woman is likely not considered as other by many people, at least consciously. But as I will further elaborate in the second chapter of this thesis, Simone de Beauvoir argued that compared to men who are the "default" in our society, women are other. Because of this, many people have a bias – whether conscious or not – of preferring men to women. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet present a few studies made in classrooms that have interesting results relevant to this topic: Myra Sadker and David Sadker (1985) found that teachers are more likely to tolerate boys calling out the answers than girls (2013, 101). Joan Swann and David Graddol (1988) found that teachers' gaze is more often on the boys than it is on the girls (102). By gaze they merely mean attention, instead of other connotations of the

word. These results thus illustrate that teachers, if mostly unconsciously, pay more attention to boys in the class than girls. This leads to boys being heard more, which in a larger context can lead to men being heard more in other aspects of their lives, such as in the workplace. This in turn can lead to it being easier for men to get jobs, or at least higher-level jobs, than women. Employment has in fact been a topic of interest in mainstream feminism, as it remains clear that women continue to find it harder to attain high-paying positions and therefore earn less than men. The AAUW (American Association of University of Women), in its gender wage gap report, for example, reveals that on average women make 82% of white men's wages, the percentage being further divided based on the women's race and ethnicity (2020).

Another example of gender bias is the differences in the healthcare treatment that women and men receive. Sara Arber et al. performed a study where they examined the practices of 256 primary care doctors in the UK as well as the US, namely their diagnostic and management decisions regarding coronary heart disease (CHD) (2006,106). The study found that women received less attention from the doctors than men: The doctors would ask the women fewer questions and perform less extensive examinations on women than men (108). Thus, their findings indicate that "women presenting with CHD symptoms are disadvantaged in primary care" (109), illustrating the fact that, at times, women receive lower quality healthcare than men because of their gender. These abovementioned consequences of gender bias are merely a few illustrating examples of the myriad of different obstacles that women need to overcome in their lives due to men being the "preferred" gender in our society.

Unlike women, people who do not fit the gender binary, such as transgender people, are often even consciously thought of as other. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet note: "The use of the term *gender identity disorder* to characterize people who might identify as transgender…shows tellingly that trans identities are seen as deviant, abnormal" (2013, 211, italics original). Additionally, health systems as well as social circles often only recognize binary genders, which frequently leads to people who do not fit in the gender binary trying to nevertheless perform themselves as a man or a woman (Richards et al. 2016, 97). Another result of these kinds of attitudes towards trans and non-binary people is that those who do not want to hide their true identity get treated differently: The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that the respondents face high levels of mistreatment, harassment and violence in every aspect of their lives, from home to school to workplace (James et al. 2016, 4). Further, a low level of employment that is pervasive amongst trans people due to their mistreatment leads to

a high level of poverty, and the survey found that 29% of the respondents were living in poverty in comparison to 12% of the entire US population (5). This kind of discrimination contributes to unstable mental health for these individuals: 39% of the respondents had experienced serious psychological distress in the month prior to the survey (5). Notably, all of the results were even worse for trans people of color, or trans people with disabilities (6), emphasizing how intersectionality affects these kinds of issues. In another report, The Human Rights Campaign Foundation found similar results, pointing out how trans people are likely to face exclusion from healthcare (2020, 15), poverty, homelessness (22) as well as violence (14), among other types of discrimination. There is no doubt, then, that people who do not have an identity within the gender binary, especially if they have another marginalized identity, experience a vast amount of discrimination and often suffer greatly because of it.

As such, the acceptance of the other seen in *Left Hand* and *Long Way* that I illustrate in this thesis does not reflect reality, where people who do not fit the "norm" continue to face discrimination because of their "otherness". I thus argue that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* advocate for acceptance of the other by portraying characters who are able to accept people as they are, and by illustrating the positive consequences of it. I also argue that by showing readers these positive consequences and by inviting them to consider issues such as gender from a new point of view, the novels provoke readers to reconsider their attitudes and behaviors towards people who are different from them. The narratives, then, by representing acceptance of what is viewed as "the other", illustrate that when differences are not judged or rejected, meaningful relationships can form between people who are unlike each other.

This thesis is divided into introduction, conclusion, and three main chapters: In the second chapter, I will discuss the genre of science fiction and why it is ideal for exploring familiar concepts in news ways. I will then analyze how the alien characters in the novels are constructed and marked as other, focusing on gender being the tool to construct otherness, although I will discuss a few other ways the novels construct otherness as well. In the third chapter, I will analyze how the novels create a feeling of acceptance of otherness. I will present literary theories that illustrate the way readers decipher this kind of information from narratives and then analyze the novels based on those theories. I will identify textual features that create this feeling of acceptance, focusing on characterization in particular. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will analyze how the novels promote acceptance and perhaps contribute to changing readers' attitudes towards otherness. I will explain the ways in which literature is able to change readers, and analyze how the novels may affect their readers. But first, in this

introductory chapter, I will briefly present the novels as well as the theoretical framework I will be using in this thesis.

1.1 Introduction of the novels

Left Hand and *Long Way* are science fiction novels that largely focus on human characters interacting and having relationships with alien characters. I chose to look at these novels in tandem in my thesis as they contain similar themes: aliens, gender, otherness and acceptance of that otherness. Both of the novels thus have a positive outlook towards otherness, the exploration of which is the main point of this thesis. Both works have also been popular and widely read. *Left Hand*, now considered a classic work of science fiction, was published in 1969 and, according to Goodreads, a popular social media website centered around books, it has been rated approximately 128,000 times (Goodreads, n.d.). *Long Way*, published in 2014, has also gained an audience of over 82,000 in Goodreads in the few years since it was published (Goodreads, n.d.). As popular novels, *Left Hand* and *Long Way* thus have the opportunity to spark thoughts in many readers. As *Left Hand* is a classic work that has been around for a long time, it has also been analyzed several times from many different angles. In this thesis, as I compare it to a lesser known and scarcely academically analyzed novel, I hope to bring a somewhat new perspective to *Left Hand* as well.

1.1.1 *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Ursula K. Le Guin was a prolific author of science fiction and fantasy. She was raised by her anthropologist parents, whose influence is visible in Le Guin's writing, as the theme of anthropology as well as the dangers of the discipline are a part of many of her stories (Fayad 1997, 61-62). Feminist ideology is often present in her works as well. Le Guin says that although when she was growing up, "male supremacy was built firmly in every aspect of society", her upbringing encouraged her to do anything her brothers did (Le Guin, n.d). As women authors were clearly in the minority in science fiction and fantasy genres when she was writing, she had to consider the ways in which gender is intertwined with the genres. In an interview where she calls herself a "shrill and ranting feminist", she explains how she made the decision to move away from trying to write like a man and instead write like a woman, by, for example, including powerful female characters in her novels (Le Guin 2012). Both her anthropological and feminist influences are clearly evident in *Left Hand*, as can be seen from the following description.

The Left Hand of Darkness is a science fiction novel about an envoy named Genly Ai who goes to the planet Gethen (or Winter) to explore the planet and its people and to invite them to an interplanetary alliance called the Ekumen. The inhabitants of the planet, Gethenians, prove to be an interesting people to study. Gethenians are similar to humans except for the fact that they are androgynous: they do not have sex or gender. The novel is not very plot focused but more of an anthropological look on the planet and its inhabitants: It largely consists of Ai travelling on the planet and getting to know the cities and the different people and how the fact that the people do not have sex or gender affect their lives and society. The novel also contains a few chapters from a previous envoy, Ong Tot Oppong, and her field notes about examining the planet and its people, as well as some chapters from the point of view of Therem Estraven, the main Gethenian character of the novel.

In the beginning of the novel, Ai is in a country called Karhide, where he interacts with the prime minister Estraven as well as the King, in order to try to persuade them to join the aforementioned alliance. However, he does not succeed and thus tries to go to another country on the planet, Orgoreyn, to try his luck there. That turns out to be even worse as the people from Orgoreyn do not trust Ai at all and lock him in prison. Estraven also becomes an outsider as he has been banished from Karhide for betraying the king. Estraven and Ai come to be together as Estraven frees Ai from the prison. Together they have to cross hundreds of miles of ice, a journey that takes months, to get back to a city that is safe for them. They ski by day and spend their nights in a tent that shields them from the relentless cold. During their journey, Ai and Estraven get to know each other better, have discussions about gender and how it shapes one's life and ultimately form a bond that resembles a romantic relationship. During the novel, Ai has difficulties understanding the sexless and genderless Gethenian people, and he forces his own ideals onto them. It is only during his time on the ice with Estraven that he is finally able to see the Gethenians as they are, as people without gender. At the end of the novel, Estraven is killed but Ai accomplishes to form the alliance that was the aim of his mission to the planet. A ship of other humans has been waiting near Gethen for Ai's signal that the alliance has been formed and at the end of the novel, the ship lands on Gethen and the two species are introduced to each other.

1.1.2 *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet*

Becky Chambers is a science fiction author who was influenced to write about space travel by her parents, an astrobiologist and an aerospace engineer (Chambers 2015). Her writing is also influenced by her own experience of life as a queer woman. In an interview about *Long Way*

she explains that her queerness has made her consider the themes of the novel, especially gender and family, as those are issues that you think about if you fall anywhere under the queer umbrella (Chambers 2019, 15.05). She also explains that because of her own experiences and challenges she has encountered due to being queer, she wanted to create a "general sense of being open minded and learning to roll with people's differences" (17.45) in the novel.

The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet was first published through a Kickstarter campaign in 2014 and soon after picked up by a publishing company due to its popularity. It is Chambers's debut novel and the first novel in her science fiction space opera series called *The Wayfarers Series*. The novels are companion novels and can therefore be read as stand-alones. *Long Way* is about a woman, Rosemary Harper, who starts a job as a clerk on a spaceship called the *Wayfarer*, whose job is to punch holes in the fabric of space in order to create wormholes that can be travelled through, which facilitates reaching far away destinations faster. The overarching plot of the novel follows the crew of the *Wayfarer* as they accept a long and dangerous mission: to travel to a far-away hostile planet and create a tunnel there. In the beginning of the novel, Rosemary arrives aboard the *Wayfarer* and meets the very diverse crew of the ship. It includes humans, aliens of different species and an AI computer who is in control of the ship.

The humans of the crew include the mechanics of the ship, energetic Kizzy and Jenks, the grumpy algaeist Corbin, as well as the pacifist and level-headed captain, Ashby. The aliens consist of the kind and warm doctor and cook called Dr Chef, the anti-social navigator called Ohan and the very social and friendly pilot, Sissix. The AI is called Lovelace or Lovey; she is sentient and considered to be one of the crew members. Many of the characters have aspects about their gender and sexuality that are outside of the perceived "norms": Dr Chef's species change their gender during their lives, and Ohan uses the pronouns they/them. Some of the characters are also explicitly queer. The topic of gender is a thus a prominent theme in the novel. In the span of the novel, we get to read sections from the point of view of every member of the crew, but Rosemary's point of view is the most frequent. During the novel we also meet several other species of aliens. *Long Way* is not very plot based, but an exploration of the different characters and the relationships between them as well as the different planets that the crew travels to. Rosemary easily fits into the crew as its members are largely very kind, accepting and welcoming to new people. This leads to Rosemary building close and even intimate relationships with her crewmembers during the novel.

1.2 Theoretical framework: Feminist theory, narrative theory and cognitive poetics

This thesis is divided into three chapters that use different theories as their starting point, and therefore I will go more in depth into the theories in the chapters themselves. Here I will nevertheless present brief introductions to the theories that I will use in this thesis in order to help readers familiarize themselves with the topics I will discuss.

As I will focus on the topic of gender and how it can create otherness in this thesis, I will analyze the novels with a feminist approach. Ellen Rooney explains in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory* (2006) that feminist criticism is difficult to define as it is highly diverse, and therefore a clear definition would threaten to simplify the idea (1). However, she says that "Feminist literary theories are the collective conversations – often contradictory, sometimes heated – of feminist readers concerning the meaning and practice of reading, the intersections of subject formations such as race, class, sexuality, and gender, and the work of literature" (17). Considering the topic of my thesis, I will address questions of othering, the representation of different gender identities as well as the concept and construction of gender. I am thus not focusing on the idea of gender as a binary and evaluating the representation of women (as opposed to men). Instead, I am examining identities outside of the binary and how they can challenge the concept of gender that we are so used to.

My analysis on how readers understand these novels is based on narrative theory as well as cognitive poetics. Peter Barry defines narratology as "the study of how narratives make meaning, and what the basic mechanism and procedures are which are common to all acts of story-telling" (2017, 223). Rhetorical narrative theorists James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, focusing on the effects of narrative, state that

> our approach assumes that texts are designed by authors (consciously or not) to affect readers in particular ways; that those authorial designs are conveyed through the occasions, words, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions readers use to understand them (2012, 5).

Narrative theory thus examines the ways in which readers understand a narrative and analyze textual features that contribute to that understanding. In this thesis I particularly focus on how readers understand characters and their minds.

I also specifically focus on an area of narrative theory called cognitive poetics, which is concerned with "the mental processes involved in reading" (Stockwell 2005, 1). Cognitive

poetics focuses on examining, based on the cognitive sciences, the ways in which minds are constructed in fiction as well as what happens in readers' minds as they read literature. It thus examines the question of *how* people read and understand what they read. In this thesis I explore the questions of which cognitive processes are involved in readers constructing meanings in narratives as well as how those processes can lead to readers changing their attitudes or behavior.

Regarding the questions of how readers understand fiction and which cognitive processes are involved in reading, my analysis is largely tied to the concept of schemas. Schemas are "knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information" (DiMaggio 1997, 269). They are thus mental maps and conceptual entities that people have about the world around them, and that therefore help people as they go about familiar tasks. Because of schemas, people can assume that the world around them functions as they have become used to, and complete familiar tasks with ease. When it comes to reading, schemas help readers to understand literature, as this pre-existing information allows them to fill gaps in the narrative and form complete ideas based on the fragments that the texts presents. Schemas are also involved in literature being able to influence readers, as updating and priming schemas can cause readers to change in certain ways after reading literature.

In this introductory chapter I have presented the novels and theories I will use in this thesis as well as my aims and research objectives for this thesis. I have illustrated the connection between the novels and the theories I will use and shown the reasons why they are relevant approaches regarding my aims for this thesis. I have also emphasized the importance of researching the effects of literature when it comes to representing marginalized identities by illustrating the discrimination that some people face due to others' negative attitudes towards their identities. Now, after introducing the novels and establishing the theoretical framework, we can move on to the analysis chapters of this thesis, the first of which examines the genre of science fiction as well as the construction of otherness in *Left Hand* and *Long Way*.

2. Otherness, Gender and Cognitive Estrangement

King Argaven had announced his expectation of an heir…The king was pregnant (Le Guin 2018).

In this second chapter I will discuss science fiction's ability to explore the idea of otherness in a poignant way due to what is called *cognitive estrangement*: presenting something familiar in a strange context. I will also, by giving concrete examples from the novels, illustrate that both *Left Hand* and *Long Way* portray characters that are viewed as "other" due to their different identity markers. My focus will largely be on analyzing otherness constructed with aspects relating to gender, as that is a prominent theme in both of the novels. I will begin this chapter by talking about the genre of science fiction more generally, then move on to discussing the concepts of gender and otherness, and finally, I will analyze the otherness depicted in the novels.

2.1 Otherness and Cognitive Estrangement in Science Fiction

The genre of science fiction, with its endless possibilities for building alternate worlds, societies and characters, is a suitable vehicle for exploring ideas and concepts about our real world in imaginative ways. Janelle Evans states that

> Science fiction does not rely upon the audience's understanding of known possibilities, but rather insists that the audience accept the imagery and information presented as the incontrovertible reality, and thus forces the audience's minds to open to the possibilities that are rife in any new and unexplored dimension of life (2018, 155).

Science fiction thus creates worlds that are different and unreal, but nevertheless asks the reader to consider them as real for the sake of reading the story: in SF "we can credibly create completely novel societies and cultures" (Melzer 2006, 5).

However, the reputation of SF as a serious genre of literature has not always been positive and it continues to be a genre that divides opinions. As Perry Nodelman explains, often people who dislike science fiction think it is unrealistic fiction for escapism, while people who like science fiction insist that it is actually about our real world (1981, 24). Darko Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement mixes these two ideas to describe the genre of science fiction as "factual reporting of fictions" (1972, 374): a genre that makes us "estranged

from our assumptions about reality and forced to question them" (Nodelman 1981, 24). SF thus, by placing something familiar into a new setting, asks readers to consider ordinary concepts in new and different ways. An example would be a story where the setting or characters are unusual or strange for readers but the social issues in it are familiar to them from real life. This duality of the genre makes SF exceptionally suitable for exploring new and different ideas.

With all the possibilities and the diversity of the genre, the other and otherness are common concepts in science fiction. As mentioned before, SF stories often present something new and different to what readers are used to in the real world, such as aliens, robots or people with abilities that real humans do not possess. Humans, then, tend to separate themselves from these new and different entities in order to define their own identity, which often leads to the new entity to be marked as "other". As Patricia Melzer explains: "The traditional self is constituted through the notion of otherness. The inherent structure of this relationship is dependent on a clear line between I and not-I; it is dependent on the duality of the terms" (2006, 14). It is therefore natural to distance oneself and one's identity from others based on their differences and mark those who have these differences as "other".

In SF stories, the humans are thus often positioned against the other characters and they are frequently compared to each other through their differences. This can give readers insights about the others as well as humans. As Christine Cornea puts it, "the alien, monster or robot of science fiction may provide an example of Otherness, against which a representation of 'proper' human subjectivity is established, interrogated and, on occasion, problematised" (2013, 176). The other characters in the story are therefore often compared to the humans in the story as well as to humans in real life, which presents the opportunity to critically think about humans in terms of the topic that the other character represents. The represented otherness might be something found in real life, such as race, or an exploration of a real-life concept through another that can conceptualize the issue in a more poignant way, because they are able to have qualities that would be impossible in real life. An example of this could be the aliens from *Left Hand,* who are androgynous and do not have bodies that indicate any physical sex.

2.2 Gender and otherness

In my analysis, I will examine *Left Hand* and *Long Way* with a feminist point of view due to their unconventional portrayal of sex and gender. At this point it is useful to distinguish these two terms. Judith Butler influentially introduced the idea of gender performativity: that

gender is not something people are born with nor a stable identity, but rather "an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1988, 519, italics original). Gender is a social construct that a person performs by the choices they make, for example, with the clothes they wear. This is in contrast with the biological sex that one is born with and that is determined by one's physical body. This is at least the popularly accepted definition and distinction of the two terms. However, there continues to be an academic discussion about whether the concept of sex can be simplified that much, and whether sex and gender should even be viewed as separate concepts. For example, Anne Fausto-Sterling, a scholar of biology as well as gender studies, argues that sex and gender are not that easily defined, and urges the uniformity of the two terms as she raises issues that arise when using them separately (2019, 530-532). For the sake of clarity in this thesis, I will nevertheless consider the two terms as separate, as that is the widely accepted norm outside of gender studies and will prove useful in the coming analysis.

Although gender is understood to be a social construction, people use it to divide many aspects of the world in two – to men and women, causing the concept of gender to be very real in our world. Additionally, the way that the gender division exists in reality frequently sees women as the "other". Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1953) argues that men are the "default" gender in our society. She states that a woman is "defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (16). Beauvoir is pointing out that women are defined in relation to men, being what men are not, being something "other". As I illustrated in the introduction of this thesis, this othering of women and people who not identify withing the gender binary leaves them in a secondary position in society, which continues to be seen in the different treatment of the genders.

Regarding the topic of gender division, Melzer explains that neatly dividing gender into man and woman and viewing them as opposites is critiqued in western feminism. People are more complicated than that: their identities are molded by many different features in addition to gender, such as race, class and sexuality (2006, 14). Melzer also points out how transgender and homosexual identities do not fit into this standard duality of gender and therefore that they can shed light on the way gender is constructed in our society (14). SF can be an effective tool to examine these concepts as it can more easily look beyond this duality in its conceptions of gender, because the conceptions can be built with aspects outside of our reality, as exemplified by androgyny in *Left Hand.* Melzer further states that "Science

fiction's fantastic aliens and distant planets can thus become the imaginative testing grounds for feminist critical thought. These texts create a link between cultural imagination and political positions: they function as 'case studies' of how feminist theories 'work'" (11). In SF, a theory can thus be brought to life and seen in action without it having to adhere to the rules and truths of the real world. As Evans points out; in SF, the questions of black/white or male/female can be explored in a different way by creating a world where there are beings that do not tether to these groups (2018, 153). In other words, SF authors can create beings that could not be real but that are more poignantly able to explore those perceived dualisms found in our world.

2.3 Otherness in *Left Hand* and *Long Way*

In this chapter's analysis of *Left Hand* and *Long Way*, I will focus on examining the otherness of their characters. As both of the novels are largely told from the point of view of a human, I will mostly focus on the otherness of the alien characters of the novels. In *Left Hand*, the characters consist of humans and aliens called Gethenians; in *Long Way*, there are humans as well as aliens from various different species. The alien characters are explored in terms of how they are different from humans and what that leads the human narrators to think about them. The narrators clearly find the aliens odd or difficult to understand because of their difference, and therefore mark them as "other" in their view.

While the otherness of the novels' aliens is built in contrast with the humans, it is not in the traditional manner of portraying the aliens in a negative light and the humans as heroes. As Jenny Wolmark explains, using aliens to depict otherness "enables difference to be constructed in terms of binary oppositions which reinforce relations of dominance and subordination" (1993, 2). Thus, it is common to portray aliens as less-than, or as the enemy. These novels do not do so, but instead most of the characters, whether human or alien, are viewed to be on the same level, where one is not better than the other, merely different. This removes the power dynamic that often comes with SF novels with negatively portrayed alien others. These kinds of differences frequently lead to some sort of tension between groups of people, but in this thesis, I will focus on the acceptance of difference and otherness. Both of the novels differentiate the alien characters from the humans through their sex and gender, and I will heavily focus on that aspect of difference. However, in *Long Way*, there are several other ways of creating difference and I will examine some of those as well. I will focus on the idea of cognitive estrangement in illustrating how the novels, through their characters, present

ideas to readers that are familiar but in a strange context and therefore ask readers to consider them in a different way than they would in the real world.

2.3.1 Analysis of otherness in *Left Hand*

Published in 1969, *The Left Hand of Darkness* is considered to be an influential and important work of feminist science fiction, problematizing gender in an innovative way (Miéville 2018, xiv). The period right after *Left Hand* was published, the 1970's, was a time of gender exploration in SF with many works that SF author Joanna Russ calls "feminist utopias" (Merrick 2003, 247). The 1960s and 1970s were also the time of what is called the second wave of feminism. The first wave of feminism was focused on economic and legal discrimination as well as sexist attitudes towards women, and while the second wave continued to focus on those issues, it moved on to consider inequality in all areas of women's lives. It especially highlighted the impact of sexism in women's private lives (Munro 2013, 22). Therefore, it focused on the social discrimination of women, including women's role at home and in society, and the concurrent issues of domestic violence and rape. Feminism at this time was also mainly focused on white, straight and privileged women, who assumed that their experience of being a woman extended to all women (23), for which reason it has since been considered to be quite limited. Arguably, the influence of the feminism at the time can be seen in *Left Hand*, as it considers gender, society, and the roles of the genders, focusing on the general conceptions of man and woman, rather than a more intersectional approach.

As I mentioned above, the characters in *Left Hand* consist of people from two different species: humans and Gethenians. The story is mostly focalized by the main character Genly Ai, a human sent to Gethen to investigate the planet and its inhabitants. We also briefly get the point of view of another human, Ong Tot Oppong, who came to the planet before Ai to also investigate the world and its people. The novel is therefore mostly focalized by humans, and readers see the Gethenian aliens through their eyes and contrasted with their own ideologies, ones that readers, as humans, most likely also share. The otherness in the novel comes from the Gethenian people, especially from their sex and gender. Gethenians are androgynous: most of the time they are sexless, but once a month they enter a phase called *kemmer*, where, in order to reproduce, assume the physicality of either a male or a female. Most of the time, then, when readers see the Gethenians in the novel, they are in their sexless and genderless state, neither women nor men.

The fact that there are no defining differences in the biological sexes of the Gethenians eliminates the concept of gender as we have it in the real world. This is due to the fact that,

even though gender is socially constructed and "cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way" (Butler 1999, 10), people nevertheless assume other people's gender based on their biological sex. Removing biological sex from the characters of this story thus allows gender to be examined in a different way than it could be examined in the real world. The people of Gethen, in terms of sex, do not differ from each other: they are all sexless most of the time and can assume either a female or a male body when entering kemmer. As such, they are all equally able to both mother and father a child, as illustrated by a famous quote from the novel: "The king was pregnant" (Le Guin 2018a, 99). Therefore, there is no such distinction or concept as gender for the Gethenians, because when it comes to sex and gender, they are all the same. Brian Attebery explains in his book *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002) that in the feminist revival of the 1960's and 1970's, feminists tried to search for a tool to challenge gender assumptions and that androgyny was one of those tools that they decided to use (129). Eliminating gender altogether in this way gives the opportunity to remove all the restrictions it creates as well as visualize a world without it.

Gethenians not having sex or gender turns out to be a large conceptual challenge for the human characters Ai and Oppong, as well as for readers. Trying to imagine the characters as neither male nor female poses a challenge due to the fact that the gender binary is profoundly infused to every part of life in reality. When interacting with the main Gethenian character of the novel, Estraven, Ai thinks to himself:

> Though I had been nearly two years on Winter I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own (Le Guin 2018a, 12).

Ai's thought process illustrates his difficulty to see Gethenians as they are, even though he is completely aware that they are different from humans in this way. He cannot help but to place his own familiar conceptions on these people to whom they do not apply. Ai thus sees the Gethenians as other due to their sex and gender. As Attebery points out "Genly Ai, a man of good will but not particularly acute perceptions, is able to articulate all the reader's objections - *These people are freaks, How can I trust a woman who is also a man, Where do I fit into all this?* - and thereby defuse them" (2002, 130-131, italics original). Readers, like Ai, are most likely unfamiliar with the idea of androgyny due to how common the view of gender as a

binary is in our societies, and are therefore able to share Ai's feelings about them, and perhaps even comforted by the fact that Ai does not embrace the difference that Gethenians exhibit. As Attebery notes: as a human Ai is "one of us, our surrogate in the text" (130). It is only close to the end of the novel that Ai is able to admit to seeing Gethenians as they are and actually understanding them. I will discuss Ai's acceptance of the Gethenians further in the third chapter of this thesis.

The other human narrator, Oppong, writes in her field notes about the question of the Gethenian sex and says: "They do not see one another as men or women. This is almost impossible for our imagination to accept. What is the first question we ask about a newborn baby?" (Le Guin 2018a, 94). By stating that the Gethenians' way of being is "almost impossible" for us to accept, Oppong reveals that she views them as other. Oppong is conscious of the challenge that androgyny presents to us humans due to how present the concept of gender is in every part of our lives. Our minds are continuously programmed to consider gender when we think about people. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet state:

> Gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so commonplace that we take it for granted that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact (2013, 1).

In other words, the concept of gender is so familiar to us and we are so used to seeing the gender dichotomy reinforced with our daily interactions that it seems to be an unshakable truth of life. *Left Hand*, by removing sex and gender, places those familiar-to-us concepts in an unfamiliar context: to an alien planet where these concepts are completely different from ours. This is how the novel creates the feeling of cognitive estrangement. It invites readers to see the concept of gender in a new way and to consider the gender system that we currently have in place. It also invites readers to see the consequences of a different gender system and challenge the differences that we see to exist between men and women merely because of their gender.

As we occasionally get the point of view of the Gethenians in the novel, sometimes it is the humans who are viewed as "other". Because being genderless and sexless is the normal state for a Gethenian and they assume a male or female body only in order to reproduce, they view humans as being in a constant state of kemmer, and therefore, as perverts. The king of Karhide asks Ai about humans and says: "so all of them…are in permanent kemmer? A

society of perverts?" (Le Guin 2018a, 36). He continues to say that "it's a disgusting idea" and that he does not see why people "should want or tolerate any dealings with creatures so monstrously different" (36). The king's strong word choices emphasize his negative attitude towards these people who are different from him. Humans, unlike Gethenians, are constantly affected by their sexuality, whereas Gethenians do not consider the issue of pairing up or procreating outside of kemmer. Humans having genitalia at all times is thus unsettling for Gethenians as they find it hard to understand how humans can live with sexuality being a constant in their lives. Otherness in the novel is therefore constructed through the human characters as well, when reading from the point of view of the aliens.

Although *Left Hand* is an interesting and rather radical thought experiment, it should be noted that there are some aspects of the novel that challenge the conception of these characters as other, and therefore hinder the effect of the thought experiment. Le Guin received a large amount of critique for the way she chose to tell this story and how it takes away from the challenge that the novel presents to readers. Le Guin herself has written about the criticism she received and, in her essay *Is Gender necessary? Redux* (1989), says that the most frequent criticism she receives is that "the Gethenians seem more like *men* instead of menwomen" (145, italics original). Le Guin goes on to explain that people have been displeased by her decision to use the masculine pronouns he/him when referring to the Gethenians, because that leads readers to view them simply as men. In this thesis, in order to favor continuity and clarity, I will also refer to the Gethenians with masculine pronouns, despite it not being the ideal choice for genderless characters. Le Guin also admits that she should have shown Estraven, the main Gethenian character in the novel, in roles that readers would consider feminine, such as mothering children. Instead, Estraven occupies roles that are considered masculine, such as prime-minister, prison-breaker or sledge-hauler (145).

Furthermore, Le Guin admits that *Left Hand* "allowed men a safe trip to androgyny and back, from a conventionally male viewpoint", whereas many women wanted a more daring exploration of androgyny and to see androgyny explored from a woman's point of view (146). The narrator has in fact been criticized for his inability to see Gethenians as they are and making readers see them through his unaccepting eyes, again lessening the effect of the thought experiment. As Attebery points out, the novel would probably not have been as popular as it was with a male audience were it narrated by someone who did not have as many objections to the Gethenians as Genly Ai (2002, 131). I agree with these criticisms about making the novel too masculine and believe that a part of the reason why it may be hard for readers to view the characters as sexless and genderless is due to these factors. However, I

argue that even if the story had been constructed in an ideal way, more daringly, it would still be difficult for readers to view the characters as androgynous, as, due to the way that the gender binary is inextricably embedded in our society, it is such an unusual concept for us.

2.3.2 Analysis of otherness in *Long Way*

Published in 2014, *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet* has faced a different audience than *Left Hand*. In the 50 years between these two novels' publications, the world has arguably become more aware and progressive about sex, gender and sexuality. After 2010, we are in what is called the fourth wave of feminism, where, in addition to demanding basic rights for women, feminists have moved on to consider topics like queer theory and intersectionality, as well as using the internet as a tool for resistance (Munro 2013, 23). Queer theory emphasizes the idea that gender and sexuality are fluid and therefore that the concepts of man and woman are not as binary as they are often thought to be (23). Focusing on intersectionality means that there is more emphasis on the fact that different women have different experiences based on their other identities such as race, class and sexuality. However, even contemporary feminism often continues to be focused on the issues of straight and privileged white people (25). The influence of fourth wave feminism can clearly be seen in *Long Way*: It includes a wide range of different kinds of characters of different races, genders and sexualities. Additionally, it moves beyond the conversation of differences between the blanket identities of men and women. As it is science fiction and does not need to abide by the rules of reality, there are aspects of the characters that are clearly fictional, but nevertheless reflect the idea of intersectionality and difference in identities.

Although readers do get the point of view of all the crewmembers during the novel, it is mostly focalized through the main character, Rosemary, who is a human. As she meets the other characters on the ship and gets to know them better throughout the novel, it is clear that the others are different from her and have aspects about them that are hard for her to understand and get used to. This creates the feeling of otherness of the other characters, and as readers of the novel are also human, they most likely share Rosemary's feelings about the strangeness of these characters. I will focus on the otherness of the three main alien characters in my analysis of this novel: Dr Chef, Ohan and Sissix. They are all aliens of different species and their appearances are strange to Rosemary. Dr Chef is twice the size of Rosemary, he has six identical limbs and is "rotund and fleshy, with dappled grey skin" (Chambers 2015, 34). Ohan is covered in ice-blue fur and walks on all fours (73), and Sissix has moss green scales, no nose or lips, and a "multicolored shock of feathers covered her head like a short festive

mane" (25). They also all have other elements about them that are strange to Rosemary: they are therefore other in more than one way.

As in *Left Hand*, otherness in *Long Way* is also constructed through sex and gender. When Dr Chef introduces himself to Rosemary, he says that he is "currently male" (35). Rosemary asks for clarification and Dr Chef goes on to explain that "biological sex is a transitional state of being for my species. We begin life as female, become male once our egg-laying years are over, then end our lives as something neither here nor there" (35). Changing one's sex and gender in this manner is reminiscent of the Gethenians, and it is equally difficult for us humans to understand how these characters experience and define their own gender identity because of it. This fluidity of physical sex, and therefore presumably gender as well, challenges the fixed idea of gender we have. In an encounter between Dr Chef and Sissix, Sissix calls Dr Chef a father and Dr Chef finds that amusing as well as odd, because he "was only ever a mother" (147). This is reminiscent of the line about the king being pregnant from *Left Hand*, and equally strange to us, because the idea that a man or a male could be a mother is a challenge to our conceptions of sex and gender.

In addition to a character that challenges gender norms, in the universe of this novel, there is a system of gender-neutral pronouns. While gender-neutral pronouns are common in many languages, and the characters in the novel do not speak English but a fictional language called Klip, the fact that the novel was written in English, a language without clearly established gender-neutral pronouns, emphasizes the unusualness of them. In English, the most common non-gendered pronoun is "they", but it is not used as widely as the gender-neutral pronoun in the novel. For example, "they" is rarely used with proper names and is often replaced by "he or she" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013, 216).

In the novel, when Rosemary does not know the gender of a character and therefore does not know whether to use female or male pronouns, she uses the neutral pronoun "xe" (Chambers 2015, 43). Having a gender-neutral pronoun in a language where there are pronouns for women and men separately challenges the fact that currently, in English, there is no such system, even though it would benefit some people and help them feel safe and secure in their identity. After Rosemary calls a character "xe" due to the fact that no implications about their gender were mentioned, she explains that "it was the only polite thing to do when no gender signifiers had been given" (43). In reality, there has been interest in creating gender-neutral pronouns in English, such as "ze/zir" or "e/eir", particularly by transgender people whose lives these pronouns would facilitate (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013, 217). However, they have not gained enough attention or interest to be widely used. Chambers in

this novel thus seems to be advocating for the usefulness of such pronouns, illustrating how the lack of gender-neutral pronouns can lead to misgendering people, which can be rude. The neutral pronouns are also used throughout the novel when a character does not know the gender of the person they are referring to, inviting and forcing readers to adopt this way of thinking. Gender-neutral pronouns are likely relatively easy for readers to understand, as the use of pronouns is an ongoing conversation in the real world. However, just like androgyny, it challenges the idea of gender being divided neatly into two by presenting a third alternative.

In addition to having non-gendered pronouns, the novel also includes a character who uses the pronouns they/them. Ohan is of a species called Sianat Pairs, who do not identify as individuals due to a neurovirus that they are infected with during childhood. The virus is included in their identity so detrimentally that after being infected, Sianats identify as pairs (Chambers 2015, 43-44). Although it is not because of their gender, but instead because they identify as a unit of two instead of one, the fact that the pronouns they/them are commonly used in real life as a gender-neutral pronoun relates their use in this novel to the topic of gender. Calling someone they instead of he or she is another way of challenging the idea of the gender binary and dividing people neatly into two boxes. Rosemary starts calling Ohan they/them after learning this fact about them, but admits to herself that "the plural thing was going to take some practice" (44). This indicates that while Rosemary is willing to refer to them with the correct pronouns, it is something that is hard for her to understand, something she is not used to, something other.

Later in the novel Ohan is cured from the virus and therefore comes to lose his plurality, causing his pronouns change to he/him. The captain of the ship, Ashby, admits that "after years of making sure he got the pronouns right" it was a "hard habit to break" (397). However, this thought process illustrates that Ashby considers it important that he use the correct pronouns. The fact that the characters in the novel have no issue with changing the pronouns they call their friend sends the message that the current rigid pronoun system in English has room for improvement and that it is perfectly fine to change your pronouns during your life. It thus emphasizes the fluidity of identity and gender that is often forgotten in our society.

Moving away from otherness constructed through gender, the character Sissix is marked as other in a couple different ways. She is an alien of the species Aandrisk, who are very physically affectionate with everyone to the point where they often make humans uncomfortable, because some behavior that Aandrisks view as friendly, humans view as sexual. Sissix explains that Aandrisks consider coupling as humans do eating a meal:

"something you can do in public, with friends or with strangers" (252). When the *Wayfarer* crew travels to the Aandrisk planet, Rosemary witnesses Sissix being intimate in public with another woman: Sissix "spread her fingers wide and ran them up from the old woman's scalp to the tips of her feathers…To Human eyes, they looked like reunited lovers behind a bedroom door, not at all like two strangers in an open-air market" (125). Rosemary is bewildered by this, illustrating how humans expect that intimacy should happen behind closed doors, and therefore a public display of affection can be strange and uncomfortable for them to witness. Sissix behaving in this manner thus marks her as other in Rosemary's eyes.

In addition to their sexual behavior, Aandrisks have a family system where they are born into a hatch family and move on to a feather family in their youth. Hatch families consist of adoptive parents and possible siblings. Feather families, on the other hand, consist of friends and lovers instead of actual relatives, and the families can change as life goes on and people meet new individuals they want to share their lives with. When Aandrisks want to start having children of their own, they form a house family that consists of parents and adopted children (251-252). It is even common to give away your own children to others who are more capable of raising them. As such, the Aandrisk family system emphasizes the idea of found families as opposed to biological ones. In reality, this is an exception to the norm, and, as Hermida Ramos states, "from the beginning of the novel the cisheteronormative model of family is challenged, and treated as one of many options of social organization, rather than as the hegemonic model" (2020, 40). The cisheteronormative model of family refers to the common idea of a family consisting of a husband, wife and their children. The family system in the novel therefore prioritizes free will in creating your own surroundings instead of having a responsibility to people who are biologically related to you. This idea can be easily related to queer communities in real life, as found families are common for queer people in response to their original families' rejection (Hammack et al. 2019, 581). As queerness is unaccepted by many, even by queer people's own biological family members, queer individuals often need to find their family outside of their biological one, by building a community of friends and loved ones that accept them as they are.

Sissix thus considers the crew of the *Wayfarer* her closest family and she does not keep in contact with her biological children, nor does she feel the need to. She does not even consider them to be her family or herself to be a mother (Chambers 2015, 253-254). As it is the norm for humans to be close to their biological families, it can be difficult to understand that someone would not care to have their biological family in their life. Rosemary's reaction to this information about Sissix reflects this idea: "she chided herself for being so species-

centric, but something about this knowledge made her view Sissix differently. She was surprised to realise the depth of her Human concept of motherhood, the idea that procreating fundamentally changed you" (253-254). Sissix's views on family thus makes her different from humans, and therefore, other to Rosemary and readers. Nevertheless, Rosemary "chides" herself for viewing Sissix differently because of this, illustrating that she does not want to judge Sissix. This is yet another aspect of the novel where Chambers takes an issue that people in reality often view as outside the norm, and illustrates the idea to readers through alien societies in order to open readers' eyes to the topic; in this case, the possibility of not seeing found families as unacceptable.

In addition to the alien characters being marked as other in this novel, similarly to *Left Hand*, the aliens in this novel view the humans as strange. Sissix, when talking about humans, says: "I'm tired of how clingy they get around kids that don't even belong to them. I'm tired of how neurotic they are about being naked. I want to smack every single one of them around until they realise how needlessly complicated they make their families and their social lives and their – their *everything*" (146, italics original). Thus, although the otherness in this novel is mostly constructed through the alien characters, it comes from the humans as well.

In this chapter I have illustrated science fiction's ability to portray otherness in creative ways. Due to cognitive estrangement, SF stories are able to create characters that shed light on issues that are prominent in reality and invite readers to adopt a new point of view. In this chapter I have shown that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* both include characters that are considered other by the human characters, often because of aspects that are related to gender. By presenting characters who have different outlooks on sexuality or family, who have strange physical bodies, who do not have sex or gender or who have different pronouns than she or he, the novels display characters that are marked other in the human characters' as well as readers' minds. This otherness is precisely why the novels are able to invite readers to consider these familiar topics from a different perspective. The portrayal of otherness also allows the novels to provide commentary on the topics of otherness and difference, and they do so in a way that encourages acceptance. In the following chapters I will analyze how the characters' attitudes towards this otherness can be inferred and what consequences those inferred attitudes might bring. I will also delve deeper into the possible consequences of the idea of cognitive estrangement and exposing readers to new ways of thinking about familiar topics.

3. Acceptance of the other

Do not judge other species by your own social norms (Chambers 2015).

In this third chapter, I will analyze how the narratives of the novels construct a feeling of acceptance of otherness. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, both of the novels include alien characters that the human characters of the novel consider to be other and vice versa. In this chapter I am specifically trying to answer the following question: How do readers get the sense and know that the characters are accepting of the other? I argue that both of the novels ultimately have a positive outlook towards the other, despite them portraying characters that have difficulties understanding them. To help me with my analysis of how readers receive these novels, I will draw from narrative theory as well as cognitive poetics, specifically concentrating on analyzing representations of characters' minds with speech categories as well as decoding characters' behavior with Theory of Mind. I will first present an overview of the theoretical background for this chapter and then move on to analyzing the novels.

3.1 Creating meaning with schemas

In literary studies, there has been a shift towards examining the reader-side of the process when analyzing how texts are received by readers (Bortolussi and Dixon 2003, 2), which can be seen in the emergence of reader-response theory around the 1960's (Purdue Online Writing Lab n.d.). This shift emphasizes the idea that readers construct the meaning of texts from the words that the author has written, and, thus, the meaning of a novel is actually created within the reader and not in the text itself. As Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon state, "forms of narrative discourse are only meaningful when understood in the context of their reception" (2003, 2). However, this does not mean that the text is not essential in constructing the meaning of a narrative, because the meaning that readers construct is of course based on the text itself. As Olivia Fialho points out: "literary reading always implies both a *text* and a *reader* in a reciprocal experience at a particular time and place. In such a fluid exchange, both text and reader are mutually modified" (2019, 2, italics original). The text thus has an influence on how readers understand it, but readers will bring their own experiences in the process of reading and interpret the text with that knowledge. Authors leave gaps in the narrative that readers are supposed to fill with their own ideas and inferences, and the way these textual cues are presented guides readers to a specific conclusion. In other words, although there are gaps in the narrative, authors usually leave clues that signal readers how to

interpret those gaps. There is thus an assumption that readers decode the novels in a way that the author intended them to. In this chapter, I am analyzing the texts of the novels and the specific cues in them that make readers decode and understand them in a certain way.

The textual features that allow readers to understand that the characters are accepting of the other are linked to characterization, and therefore in order to examine the features, I am examining the characters of the novels in particular. Readers construct their ideas about characters the same way they do entire texts: with the textual cues that the author gives them as well as with their personal knowledge and experience that they use to decode those textual cues. As Bortolussi and Dixon explain: "the actions, thoughts, and beliefs of characters in the story world do not transparently provide information about characterization. Instead, that behavior must be interpreted as signs, and the reader's knowledge of people in the world is what allows those signs to be decoded" (2003, 141). In other words, based on what they know about real life, readers are able to infer what characters' speech, thoughts and actions mean. These interpretations happen so automatically that readers find it difficult to distinguish whether their ideas about characters can be found in the text or if it was supplied themselves (153). Thus, it is something that readers do without having to consciously try to assign meaning to what they are reading, but instead, they allow the text to guide them. Furthermore, readers have pre-existing ideas about which traits go together with which actions and therefore they are able to mark characters with certain traits based on their behavior (149). This is exactly what I will do in this chapter in order to illustrate that the characters in *Left Hand* and *Long Way* are accepting of the other: to find instances the characters' actions that indicate that characteristic.

In order to fill in the gaps left by authors, readers draw from pre-existing information called scripts or schemas, which are units of information that are linked to specific concepts that can be on the level of words, sentences or texts (Stockwell 2002, 77-78). We retrieve these schemas in order to have contextual knowledge (75) that makes communicating easier, as we can rely on this information to create a part of the meaning. The retrieval of schemas is a cognitive process that is not exclusive to the act of reading, but it is used by people in every facet of life in order to get through familiar situations. A very simplistic example would be that people have schemas about going to the grocery store, where they know to expect that there are items on shelves that are supposed to gathered and then paid for at the check-out before leaving. While reading, people thus retrieve relevant information to a situation and in that way, they are able to create a meaning for that situation and make judgments based on their schemas. To illustrate this, we can go back to the example of traits that can be linked

with behavior: Readers have schemas about people who are kind and therefore based on a few examples of actions of a character, they are able to attach that schema to a character, and create a more comprehensive picture of them. In other words, readers use schemas to attach larger contexts of meaning to fragmented amounts of information that can be seen in the text.

In this context it is important to mention that "schemas belong to people not texts" (83), and that this kind of pre-existing information is certainly personal to each reader. Therefore, analyzing how a text is received by hypothetical readers only based on the features of the text is somewhat limited. In order to make definitive claims about how readers understand or respond to texts, it is necessary to test readers empirically. As I decided not to test readers due to the scope of this thesis, I will rely on the textual cues that I can find in the texts themselves. Bortolussi and Dixon note that "there is undoubtedly broad consensus in the population concerning how traits are related to actions" (2003, 155). In other words, most readers infer characters' actions in a similar manner. This is why I feel comfortable making general claims about how readers would understand the characters of these two novels, despite knowing that not every individual will understand them the same way.

Thus, I am merely looking at the textual cues in the novels in order to illustrate how readers might receive them and the schemas they likely activate in readers. In order to trust the textual cues to cause a certain effect for a majority of their readers, Bortolussi and Dixon created criteria to identify textual features that are valuable in this kind of analysis. They state that the features, in order to be valuable, need to be "objective, precise, stable, relevant, and tractable" (38). They created these criteria with the aim of using them in empirical research into real reader responses, but these criteria are useful to keep in mind even when I am not actually testing readers based on them. These criteria emphasize the fact that when making assumptions based on the text alone, it is necessary to consider aspects from the text that many readers would understand the same way. I will thus use these criteria as guidelines for my examples of textual cues.

In order to find the specific cues I am looking for, I will turn to Alan Palmer's idea of fictional minds. Palmer explains that "most novels contain a wide variety of evidence on which readers base their conjectures, hypotheses, and opinions about fictional minds" (2004, 11). I am focusing on this kind of evidence in order to demonstrate that the characters in these novels are accepting of the other. This evidence mostly consists of what the characters say and how they act, because "just as in real life the individual constructs the minds of others from their behavior and speech, so the reader infers the workings of fictional minds and sees these minds in action from observation of characters' behavior and speech" (11).

One of the ways to analyze fictional minds is thus the way characters speak and think, as the words and thoughts of characters convey what they are like. In order to understand and categorize the various ways of speaking and thinking and how they let readers into fictional minds, Palmer presents different speech categories. The categories for speech and thought are the same, because in classical narratology it is assumed that the categories work the same way for both speech and thought (53). Palmer thus divides fictional speech and thought into three categories: direct thought, thought report and free indirect thought (54). As there are only instances of the former two in the novels I am analyzing, I will focus on those. Direct thought verbally represents the character's actual thoughts, while thought report presents "characters' thoughts in the narrative" (54). An example of direct thought is "I wish I was home" while the same in the form of thought report would be "she wished she was home". Palmer goes on to explain that "direct thought can be used only for inner speech" and "thought report is suitable for presenting all areas of the mind, including inner speech" (56). Direct thought thus only illustrates the words of characters' speech or thought, while thought report can include additional information about what is going on in a character's head.

This means that with direct speech and thought the characters' minds are mostly portrayed with direct representations of their thoughts and there is no added layer of mental functioning that can be inferred from these characters. Bortolussi and Dixon note that:

> Direct speech might require more inferential processing because it is unaccompanied by narratorial cues as to how to interpret the character's words. For this reason, direct speech is sometimes thought to pose a greater interpretational challenge for the reader; he or she must "read between the lines" without any assistance from the narrator (2003, 203).

Because of minimal narratorial interference, the utterances are not accompanied by additional explanations of the characters' mental states, but instead they must be inferred from the actual words that they are saying or thinking. However, regardless of the speech category, the narrator can convey some information outside the words themselves, for example, by explaining *how* a character says something or by explaining the context (203). Additionally, with direct speech readers presumably experience a stronger sense of immediacy to characters, as they are speaking directly to readers, as in a play (202). Thus, even though direct speech may provide the least information, it creates a possibility to be closer to a

character, and therefore it may cause readers to find it easier to understand the characters' mental states.

Unlike direct speech, thought report allows authors to include information about the mental functioning that characters are experiencing. This means that the narrative includes the narrator's explanations and inferences about what characters are thinking, which makes it easier for readers to understand what is going on in characters' minds. As Palmer notes: "The mode of thought report is ideally suited to informative presentations of the purposive and directive nature of thought as well as its social nature" (2004, 76). Thus, through thought report, authors are able to present characters' thought processes more comprehensively, including the characters' motivations as well as the context of the thoughts. Therefore, thought report is the most useful representation of thought when trying to form whole pictures of characters, as it allows readers to decipher mental functioning in addition to the conscious thoughts of the characters.

In addition to representations of speech and thought, another way to analyze fictional minds is through the behavior of characters. To understand the reasons behind characters' actions, readers use their mind reading ability, also called Theory of Mind. Lisa Zunshine explains that Theory of Mind refers to "our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (2006, 6). For example, if a person is laughing, we can assume that they found something to be funny, and most often we would be right. This ability is not limited to understanding fictional people: people use their mindreading ability daily to understand other people. Thus, readers do not necessarily need direct access to characters' minds in order to infer what is going on in their heads. Zunshine also explains that while reading, we can trust our interpretation of a character's action, because if it was something else than the "default" interpretation, the author would have explicitly told so (3). She further states that "we all learn, whether consciously or not, that the default interpretation of behavior reflects a character's state of mind, and every fictional story that we read reinforces our tendency to make that kind of interpretation first" (4). Thus, because making the default interpretations causes stories make sense to us, we continue to do so when we are reading. Bearing this in mind, it is also easier to make generalizations about how readers will infer the reasons behind characters' actions. In analyzing *Left Hand* and *Long Way*, I will thus also use Theory of Mind in order to understand how the characters' behavior explains that they are accepting of the other.

3.2 Acceptance of the other in *Left Hand*

In *Left Hand*, acceptance of the other is gradually built throughout the novel. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the main character of the story, Genly Ai, is struggling to understand the Gethenians and therefore for the first half of the novel, he does not accept them. However, his journey through the glacier with Estraven helps him understand the Gethenians and their difference, and finally accept them as they are. I argue that building the novel in a way that the narrative presents a journey towards acceptance and shows the positive consequences of the acceptance sends the message that we should be able to learn from people that are different from us instead of judging them. As I mentioned before, this novel is not plot-focused, but instead involves an exploration of the Gethenians as well as Ai's interaction with them, allowing more room to be devoted to the themes of acceptance and otherness.

The novel is told through a collection of reports, most of them by Ai about his time in Gethen, but also some recollections of their journey by Estraven. Ai narrates his experiences from his time in Gethen and provides readers additional information about his mental processes at the time by telling the story largely through thought report. Thus, as Christine Cornell points out, due to the growth of his character, the Ai who narrates the novel is considerably different from the Ai who readers follow in the novel, and he "traces his own mental and emotional growth" in his narration (2001, 323). Ai as the narrator is thus able to portray the moments of his own growth by explaining his thought processes as he tells the story, making it easier for readers to understand what was happening in his mind during the time his attitudes towards Estraven gradually changed. However, at other times Ai tells the story as if it were the present and therefore "the reader responds to Genly's attitudes and assumptions as they are revealed moment by moment" (323-324). In these sections, readers get the sense of the characters through direct speech and thought, that is, without the narrator's additional explanations about what occurred in the characters' minds.

In my analysis of the acceptance of otherness in *Left Hand*, I will focus on the second half of the novel, as that is where Ai starts his journey towards accepting Estraven and other Gethenians as they are. In the first half of the novel, there is mutual distrust between Ai and the Gethenians. At first, Ai is incapable of understanding the Gethenians and accepting them as they are, because he is stuck thinking about people in terms of how he knows them: people who have clearly defined genders. As a result, when he interacts with Estraven in the beginning of the novel, he does not trust or like him. Ai as the narrator questions whether it was "perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him?" (Le Guin 2018a, 12), illustrating that it was due to Estraven being other to him that he found it difficult

to trust or like him. The feeling of dislike seems to be mutual between Ai and Estraven, but they are nevertheless civil and polite to one another. This is not the case with the people from Orgoreyn, who send Ai to prison because they view him as an alien whom they do not trust. It is thus only in the second half of the novel; the travel across the ice, where there is mutual acceptance between Ai and the Gethenians.

Due to the fact that during a large portion of the novel, there is no clear acceptance between the humans and the Gethenians, *Left Hand* could be viewed as a novel that is not concerned with portraying acceptance. Mona Fayad in writing about the novel argues that Ai, "despite his claims regarding the benevolence of the Ekumen, brings with it a cultural imperialism which insists on its own superiority, a superiority based on the sameness of its patriarchal vision" (1997, 65). She is arguing that Ai, despite trying to treat the Gethenians as equals, cannot help but to see himself, and humans, as superior to the Gethenians due to their androgyny. Fayad also argues that Oppong, who is herself a woman, by trying to remain neutral in her scientific practices, sees the Gethenians as men and denies the truth of them existing as androgynes (66). As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, I agree with her argument that the human characters see the Gethenians as other and therefore are unable to understand and trust them. I argue, however, that the human characters are conscious of having this mentality and they trying to get past it, demonstrating that their intentions are not to see Gethenians as inferior, but they cannot help but to do so. Therefore, I emphasize their intentions, rather than what they have been conditioned to think by their own society. Ai eventually also manages to accept them, which I will illustrate in the following sections.

In the second half of the novel, both Ai and Estraven find themselves as outcasts: Ai is thrown into a prison, and Estraven has been banished for betraying the king. They come to be together as Estraven comes to Ai's rescue and frees him from the prison. When Ai asks Estraven about the reasons behind this, Estraven explains that he has been helping Ai in his mission all along and he wants to continue to do so. He adds: "It is strange. I am the only man in all Gethen that has trusted you entirely, and I am the only man in Gethen that you refuse to trust" (199). This new information about Estraven illustrates that he has accepted Ai and been on his side, which can be inferred from the fact that he has been helping him, despite other Gethenians being hesitant and objecting to doing so. Estraven recollects Ai apologizing to him after this discussion: "He put his head in his hands. He said at last, 'I'm sorry Estraven.' It was both apology and admission" (199). In this quote the narrator, who in this case is Estraven, helps readers understand Ai's mental state when he is apologizing. He describes Ai's body language as well as what he infers Ai's words to mean. Ai's apology seems sincere

as he puts his head in his hands, which can be inferred to convey that he feels sad or disappointed in himself. This in turn may cause readers to see Ai differently, as he is demonstrating behavior that can activate a schema of a more kind and accepting person. However, despite this seeming development of his character, Ai still does not find it in himself to trust Estraven.

Nevertheless, after Ai has learned that Estraven is on his side, he starts to gradually appreciate him more, which can be seen from his words and behavior. During their journey, as Ai is a stranger to the land and its harsh conditions, he has to trust Estraven to plan their travels in a way that will allow them to survive. Ai admits that previously his "trust in Estraven had been more willed than spontaneous" but that now he "believed him completely" (211). Ai's admission further illustrates how he is starting to trust Estraven more and therefore also accept him. Despite this, he still struggles to perceive him as an equal: Ai is annoyed to get orders from Estraven, because he feels that, as the more masculine person, he should be the leader. He says that Estraven is shorter than him and built more like a woman than a man (219), and he views this as a reason for him to be less worthy of authority. However, after this thought process, Ai realizes that as Estraven does not have the same perspective on masculinity as he does, he would not understand why his patronizing bothers Ai (219). The fact that Ai considers Estraven's perspective regarding an issue that he finds annoying indicates that he is starting to understand Estraven better, and that he is willing to consider his point of view.

Another example of Ai being concerned about Estraven's feelings is when Ai thinks he has offended him and pleads for Estraven to tell what it is that he said wrong. He says: "I've said something wrong again, please tell me what it is" (248). His words, in addition to concern for Estraven's feelings, convey sadness and desperation about him not being able to learn the correct way to talk to Estraven. The fact that he says that he has done it again and "please" signal these emotions. This quote shows that Ai is able to see past himself and his conventions in asking Estraven to explain his point of view, indicating that he accepts that there are different ways of being. Ai is thus exhibiting behavior that is not consistent with the schema that readers most likely had of him earlier, which can cause readers to change the schema they associate with him to be a more accepting one.

Ai and Estraven also start to view each other as not so different: when they are discussing the topic of female sex and gender, Ai says to Estraven that "in a sense, women are more alien to me than you are. With you I share one sex" (234). This illustrates that Ai does not see Estraven as not *quite* as "other" as he did before, but he can now see that there are

similarities between them, even when it comes to sex and gender. Estraven also realizes that Ai is not that different from him. He thinks: "He is no more an oddity, a sexual freak, than I am…There is no world full of other Gethenians here [on the ice] to explain and support my existence. We are equals at last, equal, alien, alone" (232). Estraven has learned to look outside of himself and consider how he must look from Ai's perspective. In their difference, he realizes, is similarity: they are both anomalies to one another, and because there is no-one else around them on their journey, there is no-one to help determine what is the norm.

During their journey, Ai understands that Estraven has always accepted him as a human being with his perpetually sexual body, and eventually he accepts Estraven as he is as well. He watches Estraven and notices his facial expressions to be "soft and vulnerable" (248), which he considers to be feminine, and as he recalls:

> I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was at last, acceptance of him as he was (248).

Ai has finally accepted Estraven as he is, and he is now able to see him as androgynous instead of merely knowing that he is genderless, but nevertheless considering him as a man. Ai continues to think about him being unable to trust Estraven before: "I had not been willing to give it. I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who is a woman, a woman who is a man" (249). Ai's thoughts illustrate that he is now aware that he had not wanted to accept Estraven, because he saw him as other. Ai's way of describing Estraven as "a man who is a woman, a woman who is a man" indicates that he had quite strong negative feelings about Estraven due to his otherness when it comes to sex and gender. This quote thus implies that he did not want to be associated with a person like Estraven, which may indicate that he was frightened of him or even disgusted by him. After his newfound acceptance of Estraven, he is not pleased about his past behavior. Ai as the narrator recollects that "now that the barriers were down, the limitation, in my terms, of our converse and understanding seemed intolerable to me" (249-250). He acknowledges that the inhibitions of their relationship were his fault, because he could not look past his prejudice and judgments.

In his recollections Ai admits that what he had with Estraven might be called love and that "it was from the difference between us, not the affinities and likenesses, but from the

difference, that that love came: and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge, across what divided us" (249). Thus, due to being able to accept each other despite the existing differences and understand that their difference is in fact what allows them to have this kind of connection, Ai and Estraven are able to form an intimate relationship that they both truly enjoy. Ai and Estraven demonstrate that they have formed a bond by starting to call each other by their first names, which, as Estraven had previously explained, was something only reserved for friends or brothers (213). When they arrive back to civilization, and are thinking about what to do next Ai recalls that he was "depressed by the prospect of still another stage of our winter-journey, and this one not towards haven, but back to that damned border where Estraven might go back into exile, leaving me alone" (275). Ai identifies his own depression about the likelihood of soon having to be away from Estraven, indicating that he has grown very fond of him.

Soon after they arrive back to civilization, Estraven is caught by the authorities and killed for being a traitor. Ai witnesses this and runs to hold him in the last moments of his life (283). Depicting the scene of Estraven's death and the time after, Ai does not explain how the death impacted him. Readers only get a glimpse of it when Ai is talking to another Gethenian, who says that he did not see Estraven as a traitor, and Ai, as the narrator, recalls that he "was unable to see any solace in that, and only cried out in the same torment, 'Then why did they shoot him? Why is he dead?'" (287). This is another instance where the narrator, Ai himself, reveals more information about what is said by describing his feelings. Ai is clearly frustrated and devastated by the loss, which is illustrated by the narrator telling readers that he is in torment and that he is crying out the words he is saying. In addition, Ai's words themselves indicate that he is grieving and trying to make sense of this terrible thing that has happened to him. All of these aspects match with a schema of a person who is suffering because of their grief, and therefore Ai's state after Estraven's death shows that he was very important to Ai and that Ai genuinely loved him.

Near the end of the novel, Ai calls the ship that has been on stand-by close to Gethen, prepared to come down on Ai's signal and form an alliance between humans and Gethenians, and tells them to come to the planet. The King of Karhide asks Ai how many humans are coming with the ship: "and how many of *them* are there? – eleven?", and Ai explains to him that he does not need to be afraid (291, italics original). By saying this, the king indicates that he continues to see the humans as other as they are "*them*" to him. However, he says that he is no longer afraid of Ai, as Ai has served him well (291-292), illustrating that he is capable of accepting humans, even if he still views them as strange. At the end of the novel the other

humans have arrived on Gethen and are spread out on the planet interacting with Gethenians in order to be in an alliance with each other. The novel ends with Ai going to Estraven's family to tell them about their journey and to clear his name. The family is eager to hear about their journey and Estraven's son ends the novel with the question: "Will you tell us about the other worlds out among the stars – the other kinds of men, the other lives?" (300). These words, instead of suggesting fear and hatred, conclude the novel in curiosity about the other, emphasizing the novel's message of acceptance of the other.

3.3 Acceptance of the other in *Long Way*

Unlike in *Left Hand*, in *Long Way*, the characters exhibit behavior that illustrates that they are accepting of the other throughout the novel. As I explained in the second chapter of this thesis, many of the crewmembers of the *Wayfarer* are very different from each other in various ways, causing there to be difficulties between the characters in understanding each other. Despite this, the members of the crew get along with each other well, clearly enjoying the company they are in. Most of them are kind, friendly and respectful towards one another, as well as curious to learn more about each other's' species and cultures. Like *Left Hand*, instead of having an intriguing and fast-paced plot, *Long Way* also focuses on exploring the characters, their cultures as well as the different relationships unfolding between them. As many of the scenes in the novel are about the characters discussing their identities and histories, more room is left for the exploration of the themes of otherness and acceptance.

As this novel does not have a clear progression when it comes to showing acceptance in the same way as *Left Hand* does, I have divided this section into different sub-sections based on the aspects of the characters that illustrate acceptance of the other. The novel is full of examples of the characters being accepting, kind, and inclusive towards everyone, and as I cannot include all of those examples, I will demonstrate each category with a few instances that illustrate the point I am making. Thus, it is not only the examples I am showing that create the feeling of acceptance in this novel, but also other instances throughout the novel where the characters exhibit similar kinds of behavior.

3.3.1 Calling each other and themselves out

One way that the characters of the novel illustrate that they are inclusive and accepting of everyone is that they call each other and themselves out when they are being prejudiced, racist or insulting towards the other characters. Doing this indicates that they are intolerant of

prejudice or judgment based on differences in species and therefore that they want to be inclusive of everyone. Let us go through a few examples. When Rosemary meets Sissix for the first time, she is not very familiar with her species, which is evident from Rosemary's thought process upon seeing her:

> Her mind raced, scrambling to remember what she could of Aandrisk culture. *Complicated family structures. Virtually no concept of personal space. Physically affectionate. Promiscuous*. She mentally slapped herself for that. It was a stereotype, one that every Human knew whether they wanted to or not, and it smacked of ethnocentrism. *They don't pair up like we do*, she chided herself. *It's not the same thing*. Somewhere in her head, Professor Selim was frowning at her. '*The very fact that we use the term "cold blooded" as a synonym for "heartless" should tell you something about the innate bias we primates hold against the reptiles*,' she pictured him saying. '*Do not judge other species by your own social norms*' (Chambers 2015, 24, italics original).

Rosemary's mind instantly offers her stereotypical ideas about Sissix's species. However, she is conscious of having these thoughts and corrects herself in her mind and is disappointed in herself for having these thoughts, which is evident from her "mentally slapping" and "chiding" herself. Readers are able to decipher these mental functions from this quote because it is thought report and therefore allows the narrator to include mental functioning in Rosemary's thoughts. This thought process illustrates how Rosemary calls herself out for being prejudiced and wants to get rid of stereotypical thinking or having prejudice against alien species. She wants to understand and accept them as they are, even if they are very different from her and difficult for her to understand. Additionally, it is not merely her own judgment that she experiences; she also thinks about how disappointed a former professor of hers would be and how he would "frown" at her if he knew what she was thinking. Seeing this thought process creates a feeling of acceptance, because it is clear that Rosemary does not want any negative thoughts about Sissix in her head, but wants to accept her, and presumably any other alien, as they are. This quote thus illustrates that Rosemary has characteristics that indicate that she is a kind and accepting person.

Along with Rosemary, the captain of the ship, Ashby, tends to call people out. For example, when he is thinking about Ohan and uses the pronoun "they" after Ohan's pronouns have changed, he immediately thinks "No, no, not they…he" (397). This illustrates that

Ashby is eager to get Ohan's preferred pronouns correct and that he accepts that Ohan has changed his pronouns. Another example is when Corbin is mad at Sissix for using his last dentbots (bots that clean your teeth), and Corbin complains about her to the captain and calls Sissix a "selfish lizard" (9), which is considered to be a racial insult. Ashby interrupts him and tells him that it is "not okay. I don't want to hear that word come out of your mouth again" (9). The tone in his words is very serious, even angry, which indicates that Ashby takes Corbin insulting Sissix very seriously, further revealing that he thinks that racial slurs are unacceptable.

Corbin does become a somewhat better person in the span of the novel. Close to the end of the novel, the Wayfarer has been attacked and the AI of the ship, Lovey, has essentially been killed because of it. Corbin has a discussion with Ohan about Lovey dying and what that means to Jenks, who was in a relationship with the AI. He says:

> To Jenks, this is the worst day of his life. Do you know that he loved the AI? Actually loved, as in, 'in love'. Ridiculous I know. I don't pretend to understand. Frankly I find the whole notion absurd. But you know what I realized? It doesn't matter what I think. Jenks thinks something different, and his pain is very real right now. Me knowing how stupid this whole thing is doesn't make him hurt any less (375).

Corbin is speaking to Ohan about the death of the AI and conveying that he understands that it is not about him, and it does not matter what he thinks about it. He is trying to make Ohan understand as well, because he is being ignorant and disrespectful. Corbin's words indicate that he is willing to consider an issue from someone else's perspective despite his own views on it being completely different and nevertheless be respectful and kind about it. This quote thus illustrates that Corbin, despite not personally understanding, accepts that Jenks is in love with an AI and is able to be respectful and accepting of his feelings.

3.3.2 Affection and care

Throughout the novel, the members of the crew are very affectionate with each other, illustrating that they genuinely like each other. When Rosemary arrives at the ship and meets the mechanic Kizzy for the first time, Kizzy "removed her gloves and wrapped Rosemary in an enormous hug" (21). At this point, they do not know each other, therefore it seems that Kizzy, because of her personality, would have given a welcoming hug to anyone, regardless of whom the person was. Giving a hug is a sign of affection and the word choice "enormous"

further emphasizes the affection that Kizzy is showing Rosemary. Another example of affection is when Dr Chef, Rosemary and Sissix are talking about dealing with emotions after the ship has been attacked and Dr Chef says to Rosemary, "Sissix is right, dear" as he places "a hand on the back of Rosemary's head" (170). Readers can infer that Dr Chef places his hand on Rosemary in order to show affection and care. He is touching Rosemary affectionally as well as calling her dear, both of which signal kindness and caring.

Rosemary also illustrates that she is caring when Dr Chef tells her about how he lost all his children and Rosemary says: "'Dr Chef, I…' Rosemary shook her head from side to side. Her face was wet. 'I can't imagine'" (209). Rosemary is showing clear signs of empathy. She is acknowledging Dr Chef's sadness about his children being dead and starts to feel his emotions. This too a clear example of how readers are able to infer mental states from actions, as the description of her shaking her head and her face being wet clearly indicates to readers that Rosemary is crying and therefore that she is sad. Additionally, Rosemary acknowledges that despite her feeling sad, she cannot completely understand Dr Chef, as she does not have children of her own. Therefore she is also being respectful of Dr Chef's experience.

3.3.3 Politeness and respect

In general, the characters of the novel are depicted as polite and respectful towards one another. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, when Rosemary meets someone for the first time and does not know their pronouns, she uses gender-neutral pronouns because it is polite, and because it can be hurtful to misgender people. The characters take it as a given that they should respect the wishes of the other characters. For example, when Rosemary learns about Ohan's pronouns, she admits that it might need some time to get used to (44), but her thinking illustrates that she is immediately on board with using the correct pronouns, instead of trying to get away with what she herself is used to. As Genly Ai in *Left Hand* wants to speak to Estraven in a way that does not offend him, the characters in this novel want to do so as well in order to ensure that everyone can be comfortable and accepted. This can also be seen when Rosemary tells Sissix: "You go out of your way to make everyone aboard this ship comfortable, to show us affection in the way *we* expect it" (274-275, italics original).

Another example of politeness is when Sissix is talking to Dr Chef and calls him a father, even though Dr Chef feels that he has only been a mother (147). This mistake on Sissix's part stems from the fact that, as mentioned earlier, people from Dr Chef's species start their lives as females but later turn into males. Sissix subsequently apologizes for her

mistake, knowing that misgendering people is not the correct way to behave, and that it might be hurtful to some people.

The members of the crew also frequently have discussions where one character is explaining something about their species to another character. These discussions are polite and handled respectfully, and they convey a feeling of the characters genuinely wanting to learn about the customs and identities of the other characters, in order to understand them better and behave in a way that makes everyone feel comfortable. An instance of this is when Rosemary asks Sissix to explain to her how the Aandrisk family system works, because she wants to understand the Aandrisks better (251). Rosemary has a lot of questions and prefaces them by saying: "I hope this doesn't sound ignorant" (253). Rosemary genuinely wants to know and understand these aspects about the alien species and asks questions about them in a very respectful way, acknowledging that she might be ignorant. By saying this she illustrates her general desire to not be ignorant, which is why she is asking Sissix to educate her in the first place.

Additionally, Rosemary shows respect when Ohan has an episode that causes him to fall down and "Rosemary dashed to their side. She instinctively reached out, but stopped as she remembered who she was dealing with. *No physical contact without permission*. 'Can I help you up?'" (318, italics original). Rosemary demonstrates her respect for Ohan's wish to not be touched and stops herself from acting instinctively and touching them. Rosemary also shows concern by "dashing" to Ohan's side, illustrating that she felt that she wants to hurry in order to end Ohan's discomfort as soon as possible.

3.3.4 General acceptance

The acceptance of the other in *Long Way* is further illustrated by the relationships the characters have and build during the novel. Rosemary starts a relationship with Sissix, Ashby is romantically involved with an alien outside of the crew, and Jenks and Lovey, the AI, are in a relationship. Being in a relationship with someone usually implies acceptance, and even, possibly, attraction and admiration. As the characters behave in a way that illustrates that they are in healthy and ideal relationships by for example calling each other sweet (328), being excited to see each other (221), or being considerate of each other's' needs (275), it is safe to assume that those emotions are present in their relationships. This leaves no question about whether these people in inter-species relationships accept the other.

Additionally, the characters treat everyone with a similar amount of kindness, and do not visibly favor people within their own species. They do not avoid the company of people

from other species, but seemingly spend time with and like everyone equally. The fact that the characters treat everyone equally can also be observed from how they consider the crew to be like family and that they have a responsibility to help everyone and be inclusive and welcoming. For example, Ohan does not like to eat together with the crew, but as Kizzy mentions, "Dr Chef always sets a place for them anyway (…) because he's a sweetie" (44). Dr Chef wants Ohan to feel welcome to join them, even though he knows they do not want to. Another example is when, during their dangerous mission to the enemy planet, the authorities take Corbin into custody due to him being an illegal clone, and Ashby says that "I know we all have our difficulties with him (…) but he is a part of our crew, and we have to help him" (289). By saying this, Ashby illustrates that he considers everyone in his crew to be important, even the man that he sometimes dislikes. He sets an example of treating everyone with kindness, regardless of the person.

Another aspect of the novel that signals acceptance is that readers observe Rosemary learning to understand and accept the characters that she previously viewed as strange. For example, when Rosemary is watching Sissix be intimate with another Aandrisk, she is at first uncomfortable, but:

> As Rosemary watched, the peculiarity of the act began to melt away. It was alien, yes, and sudden, but not uncomfortable. There was a weird sort of beauty to it, something about the way their hands moved, the ease with which they touched each other. Baffling as the thought was, Rosemary found herself a little envious (125).

In this quote of thought report, readers get a direct insight into the emotions that Rosemary experiences and can identify Rosemary's envy and admiration towards the action that she previously found strange. She learns to see the beauty in it, and therefore also to accept it.

In this chapter I have presented ways in which readers construct meaning based on textual features found in narratives. I have illustrated how the characters of *Left Hand* and *Long Way* can, based on those features, be inferred to be accepting of the other. Furthermore, I have shown that the feeling of acceptance of others in the novels is created with the words, thoughts and behaviors of the characters. Additionally, I have illustrated that *Left Hand*, by structuring the story as a journey towards acceptance, emphasizes the importance of the mutual acceptance that Ai and Estraven, and more generally the humans and the Gethenians, are able to form. The novel builds towards this aim and in the end demonstrates that there are

positive consequences from acceptance of the other and that instead of rejecting each other due to differences, we should learn from our differences and use them as a tool to be better people.

Long Way, on the other hand, is full of instances where the characters manifest their acceptance of the other, and all of those examples fit into a schema of accepting others despite their differences. This causes readers to further apply that schema to the characters and the entirety of the novel, creating an overall feeling of acceptance. Hermida Ramos argues that

> these exchanges of kindness and support are not isolated incidents, as they have a transformative motivation at their core: they do not seek to be the exception in a system that deliberately attempts to fragment and dehumanize the margins, but to establish one that uses emotions as a political and philosophical weapon (2020, 39).

In short, she is saying that the characters are not trying to be the exception with their accepting behavior, but to create a system where everyone can be safe and comfortable. Thus, both of these novels, by portraying characters that are accepting of the other, are promoting accepting different people as they are. This will be the topic for the next chapter of this thesis.

4. Promoting acceptance

The universe is what we make of it (Chambers 2015).

In this fourth and final chapter, I will consider the message that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* send to readers. I will argue that the novels advocate for acceptance of the other by positioning readers to see the positive consequences of acceptance. In the second chapter of this thesis I have illustrated how the alien characters are other to both the humans in the stories as well as the readers. Further, in the third chapter I have illustrated that the characters in the novels are able to look past the otherness and differences of the other characters and accept them as they are. The acceptance of various kinds of identities seen in *Left Hand* and *Long Way* does not represent how non-accepting people can be – and are – in real life, and there is thus an urgent need to make people more accepting of the other, in order to guarantee that everyone can live authentically and free from prejudice. One way to achieve this kind of change is through literature, or other types of fiction that people consume. Because discrimination towards otherness is common in reality, it is reasonable to assume that the authors of these novels are in some way advocating for real life to be more like the novels, where everyone can be safe and comfortable with their own identity. In this chapter I will therefore discuss the ways in which literature can possibly affect readers' way of thinking as well as the way they behave. Additionally, I will analyze how the novels are constructed in a way that advocates for readers to accept the other and perhaps even in a way that can amend readers' behavior when encountering otherness in the real world.

4.1 How literature can change people

Whether novels can influence readers in a way that leads to different ways of thinking, or even different kinds of behavior, has been a question that continues to be a topic of interest for scholars of literature. Literary theorist Jémeljan Hakemulder, in his book *The Moral Laboratory* (2000), presents many hypotheses about the ways in which literature can change people and tries to confirm or deny those hypotheses based on results from empirical research. Pertaining to this thesis, Hakemulder finds reliable results indicating that stories that portray outgroup members in a positive way lead readers to develop more positive attitudes towards that particular group (36). He examined sixteen studies on this topic and found that eight of those studies produced reliable results, and six of the reliable studies found that readers' attitudes towards outgroups changed (36). It should be noted, though, that there was

no evidence of the durability of those results, indicating that the effects of literature did not necessarily last. However, the durability of the effect was scarcely studied (39).

Other scholars have also found evidence of literature causing change. In an article about transformative reading, Olivia Fialho finds empirical evidence suggesting that literature education seems to be an effective way to affect adolescents' "insights into self, fictional and real others" (2019, 10). Among others, she presents a study by Schrijvers et al. (2019) where two groups of 15-year old Dutch students were compared. The first group of students attended literature teaching that encouraged them to engage in dialogues with the stories, as well as with their peers about the story and their reading experiences. The second group attended regular lessons where literature was analyzed. In summary, the first method of teaching was found to be more effective in students gaining insight into themselves and others (10), indicating literature's ability to influence readers.

In line with this, Keith Oatley argues that "fiction can change the self" (2011, 43). A study he conducted with other scholars found that art – in their case a short story – "can cause significant changes in self-reported experience of traits under laboratory conditions" (Djikic et al. 2009, 27). Djikic et al. tested over a hundred undergraduates by assigning some of them to read a short story and others to read a text that had the same content as the short story but was in documentary form. Before and after reading the texts, the participants answered questions about their personal traits as well as emotions. The studies showed that there was a significantly greater trait and emotion change among the participants who read the actual story, than among the participants who read the documentary version (27). Djikic et al. also did not examine the longevity of the effects, but as they conclude: "this study shows that the potential for change is there, given that human psyche appears to respond to the artistic form through subtle shifts in the vision of itself" (28).

Thus, although it is unclear whether novels tend to change readers' attitudes permanently, it is evident that novels can affect the way readers see the world and the people in it, and that portraying marginalized identities can change how people think about those identities. Although the identities seen in these novels are not real-life identities, I would argue that reading about identities that are marked other by readers contributes to a general acceptance of something that readers do not consider as familiar. Additionally, when it comes to gender, the novels present identities that do not fit into the gender binary, and as illustrated in the introduction to this thesis, that is a reason why people discriminate against others in real life.

In *The Moral Laboratory*, Hakemulder also discusses the specific ways that stories may be able to change readers and explains that one of the ways that they may do so is by activating certain schemas (2000, 64). In the previous chapter I explained that readers use schemas to construct a complete idea from a fragment that is presented in the text. In other words, readers use schemas to create a "causal representation of the story, its events and characters" (62). Activating schemas relates to changing the way that readers think and behave due to what is called *the priming effect*. This refers to the fact that "a schema is more likely to be activated if it has recently been presented or used" (64). Thus, when a certain schema is activated due to a narrative, that same schema is more likely to be activated in readers as they go about their life after reading that narrative. What I argue in this chapter, then, is that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* promote acceptance of the other to their readers by activating schemas about tolerance and understanding, as well as people learning to accept the other. Additionally, the novels portray individuals that many readers presumably view as other in ways that emphasize the fact that difference is not necessarily bad. As this will cause those schemas to be present in readers' minds after reading these stories, it may change how they perceive certain people.

In addition to the priming effect, reading literature simply develops readers' schemas, as they are exposed to new information (64). It is supposed that literature is a complex and sophisticated way to obtain information, and that it is therefore able to present information in a way that adds something new to the schemas that readers already have (64). This can open readers' eyes to new possibilities that they had not considered before. Related to the topics in *Left Hand* and *Long Way*, an example of this could be that readers can learn how good it can feel when you are allowed to be your authentic self, or, on the other hand, how hurtful it can be to be discriminated against based on an aspect of your identity. These might be experiences that some readers have never had to consider, for which reason being exposed to these ideas and their consequences in a story may aid them in learning about the possible experiences of other people.

I will also return to the idea of cognitive estrangement in this context, as it is closely related to the idea of updating schemas. As I mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, cognitive estrangement, or presenting familiar topics in new ways, can cause readers to obtain new perspectives on issues and be more open-minded about possibilities that they may have not encountered before. This is why I would argue that science fiction stories are especially capable of presenting new ways of looking at things: The conventions of the genre allow for the exploration of ideas in this interesting way. Hakemulder discusses Brecht's theory of

Verfremdung and how it "stresses the potential of literary 'estrangement' to bear on social change" (23). Brecht talks about the fact that, because of estrangement, readers may be able to realize that things they considered unchangeable can be in fact changed (Brecht 1976, cited in Hakemulder 2000). Obtaining new information or ways to look at issues through cognitive estrangement can thus change readers to think in different ways than they did before.

The quality of literary narratives compared to other texts may also be a contributing factor to how novels are able to change readers. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that literature is a better vehicle for exploring ethical issues than philosophical texts (1992), and as Hakemulder explains, Nussbaum argues that literary novels "offer detailed descriptions of concrete situations involving moral problems. Their sheer length also allows the development of a historical dimension. This should make the reader aware that ethical decisions are not simply a matter of applying the appropriate moral rules to a particular problem" (Hakemulder 2000, 15; see also Nussbaum 1992). It is thus the complexity of literature that can cause readers to contemplate the issues in it more thoroughly, and thereby develop readers' capability of understanding other people, their motives and emotions. Hakemulder illustrates this point by explaining that reading about Anna Karenina dealing with the consequences of adultery may be more useful in making readers contemplate ethical issues than reading Exodus 20:14, "Thou shall not commit adultery" (15). Thus, due to the complexity of literature, including a moral lesson in a novel may be a very effective way for readers to understand the consequences of certain actions, and therefore novels can be a more effective way of changing readers than other types of texts.

Another way that literature, due to its characters, might cause readers to change their attitudes about different people is what Hakemulder calls role-taking, or "the transformation of a mental representation of characters' emotions into an engaged, empathic response" (68). Taking the role of a character and therefore participating in their experiences can presumably cause readers to consider how they would feel in similar situations to those that the characters go through (98). This is naturally only possible while reading stories that include characters whose role one can take, which once again illustrates that the qualities of literature, compared to other texts, seem to be superior when it comes to affecting readers. Role-taking is supposedly even more efficient in changing readers' attitudes about people than priming and updating schemas (98). Hakemulder presents studies that compared readers' responses to a story with characters (priming and updating schemas as well as role-taking) and an essay (priming and updating schemas). The studies found that due to role-taking, reading narratives affected "readers' notions about other people's feelings and goals" more than reading essays

(113). Thus, role-taking can be influential in causing readers to change their attitudes towards other people.

In the instance of my analysis of *Left Hand* and *Long Way*, I am examining literature's ability to instigate positive change in readers. However, it should be noted that literature being able to affect readers implies that it has power to cause negative change as well. In fact, each year, The American Library Association creates a list of the 10 most challenged – that is, most requested to be removed from schools and libraries – books from that year and illustrates the reasons for the books being challenged. The list from 2020 mentions, for example, Angie Thomas's young adult novel *The Hate U Give* (2017), a story inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. The novel has been challenged, among other issues, due to its promotion of anti-police views (American Library Association, 2013). As challenging and even banning books in this manner indicates, some people harbor a fear that literature is able to plant negative ideologies in readers' minds.

Before we move on to analyze the novels, it is important to note that by claiming that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* promote acceptance, I am not suggesting that the authors necessarily created these novels with that specific message in mind. Rather I am claiming that the way that they chose to write these novels, regardless of their specific intention, emphasizes the positivity that comes from the acceptance of the other. That being said, both of the authors have expressed their interest in being able to achieve some sort of change through their works. While Le Guin says in her essay "A War Without End" that she does not intend to "offer any specific hope for betterment" with her fiction, she does state that she aims;

> by offering an imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader's mind, from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live. It is that inertia that allows the institutions of injustice to continue unquestioned (2018b).

Chambers, in the same vein, says in an interview that "I just hope that people who read my stuff come out of it maybe a little more willing to question, or maybe step away from, the things that they think are just hard and fast rules about what life is, what society is. That's the most I hope for" (2019, 24.55). Both of the authors thus express that they want their novels to cause readers to ponder as well as question what they have considered to be unchangeable facts. Bearing these quotes in mind, I find it plausible that the authors, in writing these novels, did have an intention of making their readers more accepting of the other.

4.2 How *Left Hand* and *Long Way* promote acceptance

Moving on to analyzing the novels and how readers might receive them, I will state, once again, that real readers react to texts in different ways and, as I am not testing readers in connection to this thesis, I cannot make definitive conclusions in regard to reader responses. Instead, I am again relying on the texts themselves and the features in them that hypothetically may lead to readers, in general, reacting to them to a specific way. I will analyze specific aspects of the novels that contribute to them promoting acceptance of the other to readers and perhaps even causing readers to change their attitudes and behavior towards people who are different from them.

4.2.1 Breaking down the concept of gender

One way that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* may cause change in readers is by the way they present the concept of gender. The novels help readers update their schemas about gender from a simple binary to a more complex concept. Most structures in the world, such as the English language, teaches and reminds us that gender is a binary divided into two: to men and women. In order to question this, there is a need to be exposed to competing ideas from some sources, such as these novels. As I illustrated in the second chapter of this thesis, *Left Hand* and *Long Way* create otherness by breaking down the familiar idea of gender and exploring other possibilities of viewing the concept. *Left Hand* breaks down the idea of gender by portraying people who do not have a sex or gender. *Long Way* contains implicit commentary about personal pronouns, including the lack of a gender-neutral personal pronoun for people who are not comfortable with the pronouns he or she. Both of these portrayals open the idea of gender to be more than merely women and men. These explorations of gender can open readers' eyes to new ideas about gender and make them more willing to accept that the rigid gender system that we are used to is not necessarily the system we ought to have. This can make readers more open to people who do not identify as men or women, and to realize that they should not be discriminated against because of their identities, which, on a larger scale, has the potential raise the quality of life of non-binary individuals.

4.2.2 Visibility of diverse identities

The novels may also help readers update their schemas about people they view as other or strange in some way and prime those schemas that have a positive outlook on the other. Science fiction, historically, has been full of straight white male characters. As Merrick notes,

because of its focus on science and technology it "'naturally' excludes women and, by implication, considerations of gender" (2003, 241). Science and technology have been widely connotated with men and masculinity and this connection continued with the genre of science fiction. These novels are notably a deviation from that, as they have only one (possibly) straight white male character. Corbin in *Long Way* is described as pink (Chambers 2015, 5) and pale (346). The other characters in *Long Way* are humans who are various shades of brown due to humans having mixed so much after leaving the Earth, and aliens, who, as I illustrated in chapter two, are different from humans in various ways. In *Left Hand*, Genly Ai is not white either, as he says he is "blacker" than most of the Gethenians (Le Guin 2018a, 56). All of the other characters are aliens who presumably would not be considered to be white men. Additionally, while the characters in *Left Hand* all appear to be straight, a fact that Le Guin later admits she regrets (1989, 144), some of the characters in *Long Way* are queer. The diversity of the characters in these novels illustrates the authors' desire to acknowledge that white males are not the only demographic in the world, and that people with other identities deserve a voice as well.

Further, as Hakemulder explains: "While reading we find ourselves in the shoes of a wide diversity of people. Thus, we get better and better at understanding moral situations from different points of view. In addition, we may come to see that people belonging to some outgroup are actually not much different from us" (2000, 97). Hakemulder conducted a study where students read a chapter of a novel about an Algerian woman. Some who read the story were instructed to pay attention to the structure of the text, while others were specifically instructed to imagine themselves in the role of the woman. The results show that both instructions led to a change in readers' beliefs, as they said that they would not accept Algerian men-women relations as normal. However, the role-taking instruction had a "significantly stronger influence" (110). As I explained above, role-taking causes readers to consider the intentions and emotions of characters and experience what it would be like to be that character. Therefore, readers having access to diverse perspectives of various people allows them to gain an understanding of different points of view and also to see that, even though they have unfamiliar identities, they still share some similarities with the readers. *Long way*, especially, seems to be a celebration of diversity and its readers get to read from the point of view of many different characters who have various kinds of identities. Thus, this alone contributes to the novel making its readers to accept otherness more readily.

4.2.3 Exposure to positive ideology

Another way that the novels may affect readers is by the characters exposing readers to their positive values by directly stating them. This again may cause readers to think about those values in relation to themselves and their lives, as well as prime the idea of those values so that they are more likely to come up in their lives. A clear example of this is when in *Long Way,* Dr Chef and Rosemary are talking about all people being capable of evil and Dr Chef says: "All you can do, Rosemary – all any of us can do – is work to be something positive instead. That is a choice that every sapient must make every day of their life. The universe is what we make of it. It's up to you to decide what part you will play" (Chambers 2015, 213). This quote illustrates that Dr Chef believes that with our choices we can make the world a different place, and he is emphasizing that we should strive to be positive instead of negative. Another instance that illustrates this is when Sissix, Rosemary and Kizzy encounter a woman who has a "disorder that makes it difficult for her to interact with others" (127) and she is left alone because of it. Sissix says that "Nobody should be alone…Being alone and untouched…there's no punishment worse than that. And she's done nothing wrong. She's just *different*" (128, italics original). As Sissix says, the woman has done nothing wrong, she is merely judged based on her difference, and Sissix thinks that that is not right, emphasizing that people should be not judged in that way. Rejection of prejudice is a theme throughout the novel, but this is an instance where it is quite explicitly expressed through one of the characters.

4.2.4 Showing the positive consequences of acceptance

Another way that literature can change readers is through what Hakemulder calls social learning (2000, 80), a concept connected to the idea of updating schemas. There is evidence that while observing others, people are able to obtain information about new ways to behave as well as the consequences of those behaviors (80). This can also happen when reading: readers observe how characters behave and "may imitate or inhibit model behavior, depending, among other factors, on our expectations of either reward or punishment. Thus, we learn behavioral norms" (80). Hakemulder also finds that previously mentioned role-taking can contribute to readers' character formation as they realize that they want to be like or unlike a character who they encounter in novels (17-18). This is another way that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* may promote acceptance: They portray characters who are kind and accepting, and readers may realize that they want to be like them as they see the consequences of their actions. I argue, then, that *Left Hand* and *Long Way*, by presenting the positive

consequences that result from the characters' acceptance of the other, may lead readers to want to behave in an accepting way themselves.

One of the ways the novels illustrate the positive consequences of the characters being able to accept the other is that the characters are able to form meaningful relationships with the people they initially saw as other. In the first half of *Left Hand*, where Ai is still struggling to understand and accept the Gethenians, his relationships with them are quite superficial. However, after Ai accepts Estraven as he is, they are able to form a deep and meaningful relationship. Additionally, as illustrated in the previous chapter, Ai is disappointed by his previous behavior because it caused him to be unable to accept Estraven earlier, for which reason their relationship did not begin earlier. Readers can thus see that accepting people who are different from yourself can result in positive relationships, and that refusing to accept others can cause regret as you might be missing out on something meaningful. As David Mitchell poignantly notes: "Le Guin recognizes that it's the difference that is the point; that no bridge between two people – no friendship, no love – can exist without difference. There is no difficulty or achievement in understanding someone who is already very like you" (2018, xii). Le Guin thus emphasizes how crucial the acceptance of difference is in our relationships.

In *Long Way*, due to Rosemary and Sissix learning to see past their differences, they are able to form a meaningful romantic relationship that they both enjoy. Ashby says that he knew that they have started a relationship by the way Rosemary looks at Sissix (Chambers 2015, 328), illustrating that Rosemary looks at her adoringly, which further indicates that Rosemary is enjoying their relationship. Sissix in turn admits that Rosemary made her family "more whole" (329), which is also clear evidence that Sissix is glad to be in the relationship. Readers can thus see their happiness due to their bond, and therefore see that by accepting each other, they have created more joy in their lives. Through the aforementioned social learning, readers can thus observe the way that accepting attitudes and behavior in these novels lead to consequences that are beneficial to the characters, namely them being able to form meaningful relationships. This in turn can lead to readers aiming to imitate those attitudes and behaviors with the intention of creating similar results.

In *Long Way*, it is not only romantic relationships that bring the characters joy. Rather, the whole crew of the *Wayfarer* is a unit that many of the characters rely on, both physically and emotionally. Due to everyone being accepting of the other, they are able to form a group that likens to a family, and therefore to enjoy their day-to-day life aboard the ship with those people. Their family-like community can be noted, for example, when Kizzy comes back after she has been fixing a ship, a task that was very dangerous, and the crew greets her:

> Everybody had jumped all over her when she came through the airlock. Sissix nuzzled her head so hard that her hairdo came loose, and Rosemary got all misty-eyed, and Jenks gave her the best hug ever. Lovey was rambling about how worried she'd been, and even Ohan came down, limping on their weak legs, to give her a respectful bow. She felt like a hero (246).

In this quote we are explicitly told how this kind of behavior from her crew mates makes Kizzy feel: "like a hero". The characters are away from their families and loved ones, but they are able to find joy in their lives in this group of people, because they make an effort at creating a nice and comfortable place to work. If readers were to "take the role" of Kizzy in this scene, they could perhaps imagine how nice this kind of treatment from friends must feel like, once again illustrating that accepting otherness brings about positive consequences for everyone involved.

Another way *Left Hand* illustrates the positive consequences of acceptance of the other is when in the end of the novel, Ai is able to message his fellow humans to come to Gethen and create an alliance between the humans and the Gethenians. Ai explains that the alliance would be beneficial for everyone because it would bring "Material profit. Increase of knowledge. The augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life…curiosity, adventure, delight" (Le Guin 2018a, 34). Their trust in each other thus enables them to exchange knowledge that the other group does not have. Some Gethenians are able to tell the future, a useful skill that presumably can be taught. As Ai says, humans have many things such as spaceships and instant transmission, but for telling the future they need to go to Gethen (66). The humans in this story are also able to read each others' minds with what is called mind-speech, which allows them to communicate non-verbally. Mind-speech is a trait that can be learned, as is illustrated by Ai teaching it to Estraven during their journey (253). Both groups thus benefit from being in an alliance as they are able to obtain a skill from the other group that is otherwise not accessible to them.

Yet another way that both of the novels illustrate that accepting the other leads to positive consequences is that all the characters can be their authentic selves and be safe. They do not need to hide an intrinsic part of themselves when interacting with other people due to fear of not being accepted or even facing violence. Chambers herself says about *Long Way* that she wanted to create a "future in which you can be yourself and in which it's safe" and where "you as you are, are welcome" (2019, 16.15). Thus, this sends readers the message that when you are accepting of the other you create an environment where everyone can be

comfortable existing how they are. All of these examples of positive consequences that the characters' acceptance of the other has caused promotes accepting behavior to readers. Readers, through social learning as well as role-taking, can understand that it is due to the acceptance of the other that these characters are happy, are able to form meaningful relationships with people who are different from them, can learn from the other, and overall feel safe being their authentic selves. Through the novels readers can thus learn behavioral norms that they may want to apply to their own lives in search for similar positive results as those observed in the novels.

In this chapter I have presented ways in which literature can change readers, their attitudes and behaviors, as well as analyzed *Left Hand* and *Long Way* based on these ways that literature can influence people and illustrated how the novels are able to promote acceptance of the other to readers. I have argued that literature is particularly adept at creating understanding for complex social topics as well as the experiences from various kinds of people, and thus, through updating and priming schemas, role-taking and social learning, also more adept at instigating actual change in behavior. With that in mind, we will now move on to the conclusion of this thesis.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the theme of acceptance of otherness in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet*. I have illustrated that the novels present a positive attitude towards otherness by showing that the characters in the novels are able to accept other characters as they are, despite viewing them as "other" in some way. In order to conclude that they are accepting of the other, I have examined the characters' speech, thoughts and behavior, as well as illustrated how those elements form schemas of people who are kind and accepting in readers' minds. I have illustrated that this acceptance leads to positive consequences for the characters in the novels, which in turn function as a base for the novels to be able to influence readers to see the positive effects of accepting those who are different from you and therefore possibly change their own attitudes and behavior towards otherness that they may encounter.

In this thesis, when discussing otherness, I have focused on otherness constructed through gender, as that is a prominent theme in both of the novels. The novels present alternative ways of looking at the concept of gender, by portraying characters who do not have gender at all, have gender that changes during their lives and characters who use pronouns outside of the binary "he" and "she". The novels thus invite readers to see gender in a different way than society has most likely taught them to consider it, illustrating that it is not a strict binary. This is something that can be naturally compared with reality, as there are many people who do not identify within the gender binary in real life. What I suggest, then, is that the novels can prompt readers to regard these individuals differently, as they read about other characters treating them as they should be treated despite having difficulties understanding them. Reading about people who do not fit the gender binary can also cause readers to realize that they are not so different from them after all, resulting in new attitudes towards these people.

As a basis for my analysis on how people understand and can be influenced by literature, I have used the concept of schemas. Schemas help readers fill in the gaps that authors leave in narratives in order to create a more holistic picture of the events as well as the characters in a novel. Literature also primes and updates readers' schemas, which can lead to readers being influenced to think or behave differently due to what they read in literature. In addition, I have illustrated that literature, as opposed to other texts, is particularly efficient in affecting readers, because literature contains characters whose roles readers can take, and because the richness of literature allows readers to consider various topics more in-depth. I

have also illustrated that the characters in these novels match with a schema of an accepting person, which can be determined by the way the characters think, speak and act, which, in turn, primes schemas of tolerance and acceptance in readers' minds.

What I have shown in this thesis, then, is that *Left Hand* and *Long Way* portray acceptance of otherness in a way that invites readers to have different attitudes towards otherness they may encounter in their own lives. I have thus discovered that this kind of positive portrayal – hopepunk – can have an influence on readers as can negative and bleak portrayals of possible futures oftentimes seen in SF. Negative portrayals of possible futures can be efficient in demonstrating to readers that their actions – or the actions of humanity as a whole – can lead to terrible consequences and that therefore one should do something about it now while one still can. On the other hand, the positive portrayal of possible futures seen in these novels is also effective in influencing readers as they illustrate that the future can be pleasant, as long as you act a certain way – in this case, that you accept those who are different from you. I have argued in this thesis that due to the way the novels are constructed, how they break down the concept of gender, portray different identities as well as positive ideology and illustrate the positive consequences of acceptance, they are well suited for influencing readers' attitudes towards otherness.

There is some variation in how the two novels promote acceptance. *Left Hand* breaks down the concept of gender in a more obvious and explicit way that *Long Way*. Gender is a very central theme in the novel, which includes many discussions about gender between the characters. In fact, Le Guin mentions that one reason why she wrote it this way was to find out what was left after eliminating gender (1989, 138). In *Long Way*, on the other hand, the topic of gender is included in a more subtle way, as there is no explicit discussion of the meaning or consequences of gender-identity. However, *Long Way* presents the themes of acceptance of otherness and inclusivity more clearly than *Left Hand* does. It includes a diverse cast of characters and makes a point of accepting everyone as they are and thereby of condemning intolerance. In *Left Hand*, on the other hand, there are only two types of people and the journey to acceptance is more of a struggle than a given. Thus, while both of the novels promote acceptance in similar ways that I have illustrated in this thesis, they vary in how strongly and explicitly they include those aspects.

By discussing and comparing these two novels in my thesis, I have thus been able to raise issues that would not necessarily be raised if they were not compared in this way. As I explain in the introduction and as I have illustrated in the thesis, *Left Hand* has been analyzed and examined from many different points of view. Comparing the novel to *Long Way* has

enabled me to examine the novel from a fresh perspective, focusing on the acceptance of otherness and the effect that this positive portrayal of acceptance may have on readers. Additionally, although *Long Way* has not been academically analyzed and therefore any analysis of it will likely contribute something new to the academic discussion of it, comparing it to *Left Hand* allowed me to explore the novel in ways that I most likely would not have without this comparison, such as broadly considering of the portrayal of the concept of gender in the novel.

In this thesis, although I examine the novels through concepts related to reader reception, I decided to focus on analyzing the texts themselves instead of asking real readers for their reactions to the stories, as the texts themselves can be very insightful in determining how readers would react to them. However, to further research this topic, real readers could be tested to find out whether they would show that reading these novels affected their attitudes towards acceptance. I argue that the novels may be able to prime or update readers' schemas about the type of people and their behavior seen in the novels and therefore have an influence on how readers regard that kind of people as well as behavior. This could be studied with empirical research on real readers that examines whether the novels are able to amend their schemas. It would also be interesting to test the longevity of those results, as that is something that has not yet been examined as much as short-term results in previous reader response research.

In conclusion, this thesis illustrates that literature holds the potential to influence people; both in how they think as well as how they act, positioning it as a tool to change to world we live in. However, as my – and the scholars' whose work I present – inability to make definitive conclusions illustrates, it still remains unclear as to how and to what extent literature is able to affect readers, their opinions, attitudes and behaviors on the long term, whether it be through realistic fiction or diverse aliens from distant planets. Literature's effect on readers thus continues to be an important topic to research as there are still questions we do not have answers to. It is therefore valuable to uncover how far literature's influence can go, in order to find out to what extent it actually shapes our world and the people in it.

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